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## COMMENTARY

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Author, Author

Fifty years on . . .

Paperbacks in brief

Poems by Michael Hofmann and Jon Silkin

Letters on Professing Literature, 'The Cosmic Serpent', The Tornielli Enigma

Among this week's contributors

### *Hugh Trevor-Roper*

GERALD FLEMING  
Hilf und die Endlösung: Es ist des  
Führers Wunsch . . .  
215pp. Munich: Limes.  
1990 2196 2

Antisemitism has often been used by rulers as a political device: as a rallying cry against a convenient scapegoat, or a diversion from real problems. Hitler undoubtedly exploited it in this way, and no doubt many of his supporters—extreme opportunists like Goebbels or Ribbentrop—regarded it only in this light. But Hitler's antisemitism was much more than an opportunistic device. It was a deep-rooted conviction, an integral part of what he called "his grandiose-firm" foundation of his ideology. His first known political writing, *Mein Kampf*, was a treatise on antisemitism, and the last sentence of his last written document, his "political testament," is a call, from the rubble of the Third Reich, for a continuing crusade against "the world-poisoner of all nations, International Jewry". He really believed in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He declared, again and again, that the Jews should be exterminated; he proclaimed that if war came, they would be exterminated; and indeed, in so far as it could be reached by Nazi power, they were exterminated: in cold blood, on a massive scale, by a vast and costly machinery specially installed for the purpose. Even victory in war was deemed less essential than the completion of this macabre operation, to which essential resources, even in 1944, were still being diverted from the German army now fighting desperate rearguard battles for the defence of the Reich.

This being so, it is surprising that no document has ever been found directly connecting Hitler himself with "the plan." The explanation is not far to seek, logically and circumstantially, on every level except the last: the direct written order to initiate the programme, to set up the machinery, to exterminate the people. Within the SS, which carried it out, the whole process can be documented; but at the person of Himmler, the Reichsführer-SS, the documented chain of command stops. It seems never to reach the Führer of Germany. He utters the historic, but never gives orders. This has enabled "revisionist" writers to claim that Himmler was not only the executor but the originator of the programme; that he alone was responsible; that Hitler knew nothing about it; even that Hitler would have disapproved of it if he had known.

*Prima facie*, such a thesis is absurd. There is neither evidence nor probability of either point being clearly in the other direction. Nor is any logical inference which clearly sacrifices the whole policy to Hitler. There may be no documentary proof, but there is documentary support. Himmler himself described the mass-murder of the Jews as "a heavy task" imposed upon him. Only one man could impose tasks on Himmler: Hitler. If Goebbels recorded the extermination in his diary, a horrible affair, he admitted, best covered in silence; but the Führer — he had evidently learned of it from him — was radical in insisting on it. These are admittedly second-hand testimonies, but in the realm of historical sense, no silliness, they are enough.

Nevertheless, the absence of direct documentation concerning the activities of Bernhard Jackel has rightly remarked that this is a problem to which some attention should be given. The suggestion has now been taken up by the German Ministry of Justice, and the industry, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of the Economy, who has followed every trail, even into the closely guarded archives of Riga, and checked every document, as far as it is still possible, by persons competent in interrogation and affidavit. His short book—215 pages—is a model report of a long and profound search. If it had not produced the missing document, it is an official order from Hitler to him: to liquidate the Jews—we can safely conclude that is the substance of the book; and the historical point is that it is not whether Hitler ordered the extermination (for that is beyond

question), but why and how he avoided giving a written order to authorize so enormous a crime.

The question why is easily answered. Such cold-blooded mass-murder was a dirty job and very few Germans, even of those who wished to see Germany *Judenrein*, were willing to endorse it. As the charismatic leader of all the Germans, Hitler could not afford to be publicly associated with it. He had to keep up the myth, indeed, and the pressure: he had to insist that World War II was the ultimate enemy and that no victory could be complete until it had been destroyed. But the exalted preacher of the crusade must not soil his own hands with the squalid business of butchery. The Germans must suddenly discover, after victory, that there were no Jews. They had all been "evacuated," "transported to the East," "exterminated," and were now conveniently out of sight and mind, therefore be out comfortably out of mind. In fact, of course, they would all be under ground in subject Poland, German authority, effectively enforced, and young pine-forests growing above their unmarked graves, would effectively hinder any casual or curious excavation.

But how was such complete separation of the authority and the act to be achieved? Who would dare to set up factories for mass-murder, and put them into operation, without the protection of a covering order? Fortunately, there was one organization which could be entirely trusted. The SS was a special organization founded on the principle of unquestioning obedience, outside the law. Orders within the SS required no justification. And the head of the SS, the Reichsführer, "*der treue Heinrich*," could be trusted to translate into formal orders even a verbal message from the Führer.

The beginning of the *Endlösung* "the Final Solution" — not of the idea, but of the machinery of execution — is commonly ascribed to the famous Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942. But in fact its origins are earlier. As is now well known, its embryo was the *Gnadenrod*, or Euthanasia programme. This programme, for the deliberate extermination of incurable invalids (who afterwards included badly wounded German soldiers) was organized by a special section, "T.4." This section was responsible direct to Reichsleiter Bouhler, head of the Führer Chancellery, and therefore to Hitler himself; but Hitler's Bouhler, the contact with the Party, the Führer Chancellery, was in no circumstances to appear to the outer world. So elaborate precautions were taken to ensure secrecy — false names, false addresses, code-languages. Nevertheless, the facts leaked out there were public protests; and in August 1941, after 90,000 persons had been killed, the programme was stopped. But the machinery was not dismantled. The personnel, their apparatus and the experience were merely transferred to Poland, to be used against the Jews. From this experience of T.4. Hitler had learned a valuable lesson. Extermination must be done very secretly, outside Germany, and the most careful precautions must be taken to ensure that he could not be held personally responsible for it. In particular, it must no longer be organized from the Führer Chancellery. Fortunately, the German people were less likely to protest if the victims were not German than Jews.

There are direct links between the Euthanasia programme in Germany and the extermination programme in Poland. SA Sturmführer Christian Wirth, whose work in T.4 was officially declared to be a "special commission for the Führer", transferred his skills and technique in gassing to his new post at the extermination-camp of Sobibor. Similarly, SS Oberführer Viktor Brack, of T.4, would be asked to send his chemist to Riga in order to assure that the gas-chambers to be erected there and at Minsk conformed to the safe pattern established at bom-bardment centres. Brack would also be and the same Brack would send gassing apparatus to Riga "for the extermination of Jews." As a Führer explained at the time, "It is a Führer

order, or a commission by the Führer".

For by this time, the war in Russia had begun; and with it the *Endlösung* had been in operation. Previously, the plan had been to send the Jews to Madagascar, and it is interesting to note that, at that time, Himmler, in a written memorandum, rejected the idea of physical extermination of Jews as "bolshhevik . . . un-German and impracticable". But Hitler knew otherwise. Not for nothing had he boasted of being "the hardest man in

mobile killing squads, operating in Russia, that the Führer was to receive regular reports of their operations, including photographs.

The *Einsatzkommandos* did as they were ordered. By the end of the year they had shot a million Jews. It was a messy business, and the method of killing would soon be changed. One of the commanders was sufficiently disturbed, before a mass-shooting in Minsk, to ask Himmler personally on whose authority the killings were

gap. In November 1941, Himmler told his representative in Russia, Friedrich Jeckeln, who was in Berlin, that the Warsaw ghetto must be liquidated. Jeckeln was to arrange the details with the Reich Commissioner in Riga, Heinrich Lohse. "Tell Lohse," said Himmler, "that it is my orders, which is also the Führer's wish." This phrase, "*des Führers Wunsch*," thereafter became standard form. Being merely a "wish" it did not need to be written down; but a "Führer's wish" was as mandatory as a written order. In July 1942, Himmler, on a visit to Auschwitz, ordered a speeding up of the extermination process "in accordance with the Führer's wish." This new phrase was very convenient and soon acquired a definition. "The Führer's wish," a former Gestapo officer explains, meant exactly the same as a Führer-order: "It is not a direct order, but is to be interpreted as such . . . the 'wish' is always communicated by a third person. It is not passed on explicitly as a Führer order; but it means an order".

The "third person" most regularly used by Count von Himmler, he also commanded the machinery for the murder on the desired scale. He also was willing to take the responsibility with which Hitler, the real originator, could not be added. But in his secret speeches Himmler let it be known that he, like his subordinates, felt that strain: a strain (of course) not on his conscience but on his nerves. "The execution of this difficult command in which the Führer has laid on my shoulders," he said, "was the heaviest task that has ever been imposed upon me"; but it was a task which it was his duty, having received the command, to perform. However, Hitler was never a man for bureaucratic precision; he liked to divide and rule; and in his nihilist zeal he was perfectly prepared to cut corners and use direct channels. He would occasionally give orders directly to Himmler's subordinates — Otto Globocnik, the organizer of the first great extermination camps, reported directly to him — and he sometimes went outside the SS altogether. The dreadful Guleter of the Ukraine, Hitler's old comrade, Erich Koch, exterminated on his own account, pleading the Führer's orders, "Befehl ist Befehl," he said; and he had whole villages exterminated in order to clear for himself a gigantic hunting estate.

From the evidence collected and set out by Mr. Fleming it is abundantly clear that it was Hitler, and Hitler alone, whose powerful will drove the whole machine of destruction. However he sought to separate himself from the dirty business, the facts were clear, and known by others, and at times even admitted by him.

"Do you not know," said State secretary Stuckert to an official who protested about the great massacre in Riga, "that all this happens on orders from the highest level?" Admirer Canaris, the head of the Abwehr, sought at least twice to protest. At first he tackled Heydrich: Heydrich replied angrily that the matter was nothing to do with him or the SS; but that in these shootings were due exclusively to the personal orders of the Führer. Canaris then tackled the chief of the Canaris tackled Hitler himself. "You are too soft," Hitler replied: "I must do this. After me, no other man will do it."

The relations between Hitler and Himmler, in this matter, are illustrated in an interesting document published by Fleming. It is an account of a conversation between Himmler and his General Maximilian von Herrmann, recorded by a SS Sturmbannführer who was with von Herrmann as his representative in the spring of 1943, had visited Auschwitz, and, in particular, the crematorium in operation. The account is in some respect a personal one, but substantially it is convincing. According to this record, Himmler expressed his sympathy with officers who were punished into a nervous depression by enforced service at gassed camps, for Hitler had designated them as "officers of the first grade" for their service, not to be refused; indeed, those who served the gas-chambers were given military decorations. He



"Reise in die Vergangenheit" (Journey into the past) token by Wolf Strache towards the end of the Second World War. This picture is included in *The Imaginary Photo Museum* (270pp, Penguin, £5.95, 0 14 006522 9) a selection of 457 photographs by Renate and L. Fritz Gruber.

ordered. Himmler replied that no one should trouble himself with such questions; that it was a Führer-order and that Hitler and he took full responsibility for everything. Then he told the commander aside and told him, "in a pretty sharp tone, that these orders came from Hitler as supreme Führer of the German government and that they had the force of law." To another questioner, Himmler replied "categorically", that this was necessary war measure, personally ordered by Hitler, and that, as such, lay outside the jurisdiction of any judicial authority, even in the SS. To a third questioner, he said: "I would similarly told, first by Heydrich, then by Himmler, that it was pointless to ask such questions: 'this was a Führer-order', said Himmler, and he himself held it his historic duty to carry it out by every means."

Führer-orders (*Führerbefehle*)  
Führer-directives (*Führerweisungen*)  
of sort of art: they had  
a recognized meaning. They were  
personally written orders. But the  
ordally concerning extirpations were  
never written: that would have proven  
the connection which Hitler was  
determined to conceal. This fact  
sufficiently explains a willer's  
instruction by Bormann, issued  
precisely this time, that "only written  
Führer-orders" could be cited  
authority. In other words, no appeal  
these verbal orders would be accepted  
as evidence, and as there were  
written orders, no connection with  
Hitler could be shown.

In this connection a new phrase  
began to appear to fill the German



himself, said Himmler, loathed the work, but he recognized his duty, as they must recognize theirs. Then he gave an explanation which "deeply moved" his hearers. Recently, he said, he had discussed the problem with the Führer. The Führer had stated that the best blood of the white races was being shed in a fierce struggle from which — unless Germany won — only the destructive forces of international Jewry would gain. If Germany won, then, of course, all would be well; no one would then ask questions. But if Germany should lose, then at least let her have used her present power to protect future generations. "I have therefore decided," concluded the Führer, "after long reflection, to eradicate once and for all the biological strength of Jewry, so that even if the Aryan peoples emerge weakened from this struggle, at least we shall have put an end to those forces..." Himmler (according to his own account) had been "deeply shaken by this order, which burdened us, as the Führer's most loyal followers, with a historic charge of monstrous weight," but he recognized the force of Hitler's argument, and saw that he must obey, confident that after decades of inevitable misjudgment and slander, the heroic self-sacrifice of the SS, in undertaking this grisly task of "disinfection", would be seen in its true, ennobling light.

That this account represents the authentic views both of Hitler and of Himmler seems to me certain; for both expressed the same views at other times. Himmler would spell it out in his Posen speech of October 4, 1943, and he frequently insisted on the necessity of a clear conscience in this business, which (he explained) was completely justified — provided that it was carried out in the right spirit — by the duty to obey and the holiness of the task. Not without reason did Hitler describe him as "our Ignatius Loyola". Hitler ordered: Himmler — essentially a "subaltern character" — believed and obeyed. In the summer of 1944, when Hungary seemed likely to surrender to the Russians, and the Hungarian Jews, protected by the Regent, Admiral Horthy, had not yet been exterminated, it was Hitler who forced the pace. Horrified by Horthy's dismissal of the Sziojazy régime "which has recently carried out measures against the Jews", he threatened a coup d'état in Hungary. Meanwhile, as Ribbentrop informed the German plenipotentiary in Hungary, "the Führer expects that without further prevarication the measures against the Budapest Jews be carried out," as in due course, after the coup d'état, they were. The man who carried them out was Adolf Eichmann, acting under the orders of the Austrian thug, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Heydrich's successor

as head of the RSHA. Though nominally subordinate to Himmler, Kaltenbrunner was the personal confidant of Hitler, even, by now, against the wobbling Reichsführer. For by now, at last, the grotesque conviction had cracked, not Himmler, but Hitler, whose "grit-firm" assurance would never fail, but in his blind *dévoit*, Himmler had been drawn in to the programme of extermination, which he had at first repudiated as "un-German" by iron will, and the firm command, of Hitler, and by now he was running out before the end of the drama. In the autumn of 1944, under pressure from his courtiers, and particularly from his masseur Kersten, he began to have doubts; again, not of morality but of expediency. He was thinking of his own survival, imagining himself the negotiator of peace, perhaps even the ruler of the new Germany. At first while listening to conspiratorial arguments, he refused to accept their conclusions. Moments of apparent surrender would be followed by bold reaffirmations of customary loyalty. "If National-Socialist Germany must go under," he told Kersten, "then our enemies, the camps, must not triumph over us, and come out as victors. They shall not see that day! They shall perish with us! That is the clear and logical order of the

Führer, and I shall see that it is punctually and fully carried out!" However, as the doubts and the pressure increased, the foundations of that loyalty were destroyed. Already, at the end of November 1944, Himmler had forbidden further gassing of Jews and ordered the extermination-camps to be destroyed. Now Kersten put him in touch with the Swedish government and mounted the plan of the Swedish Red Cross expedition to rescue the surviving prisoners from the concentration camps. Finely — surely the most macabre episode of all — in April 1945 Kersten arranged, at his own house, a meeting between Himmler, the Grand Exterminator of the Jews, and Norbert Masur, a Swedish Jew, who was sent as an emissary, from Stockholm, of the World Jewish Congress.

Everything that we know about Himmler is grotesque: his monstrous achievement, his lunatic ideas, his fatuous naïveté, his accountant's pendency, his portentous illusions of grandeur, his feeble vacillations, even his absurd appearance. But surely nothing — not even his belief that he would be acceptable to the Allies as the ruler of Germany — can be more staggering than the importance of his greeting to the Jewish emissary as they met at Kersten's fabled estate in Mecklenburg: "Herr Masur, I think it

is time that we Germans and you Jews buried the hatchet."

Hitler had no intention of burying the hatchet. As Himmler described, he pushed forward, and since Himmler had lost his will to exterminate, he called upon Himmler's most reliable lieutenants — Kaltenbrunner and "Gestapo" Müller — who had set up concentration-camps. Hitler, ruling his courtiers, issued a Führer-Befehl that the camps were to be blown up with their inmates, on the approach of the enemy; Himmler, pushed by his courtiers, insisted that they be left intact and their inmates handed over to the representatives of the Swedish Red Cross. In the chaos of defeat, Himmler's orders, or the agency of his courtiers, prevailed. Hitler could not have done worse than expect "den Treueschwärmer" from the Party and declare, with his last, impotent breath, his surprising death-sentence on the whole Jewish people. It was with words of vengeance racial hatred on his lips that the words of the unfinished "Final Solution" were down at last, to his funeral pit.

Such is the story which emerges from Mr Fleming's patient scholarship, a valuable work which puts the most straight and adds many interesting details to a terrible but still compelling story.

JENNIFER S. UGLOW

The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography  
534pp. Macmillan. £16.95.  
0 333 30987 1

It's the swiftness (though there are only a handful of them) who best symbolize what Jennifer Uglow's *Dictionary of Women's Biography* is after. Who better than Jacqueline Auriol, Amy Johnson or Sheila Scott to demonstrate that women can overcome their fear of flying (see Long, Erica) and levitate out of their conventional sphere? The book's compilation, Ms Uglow says in her foreword, was undertaken in response first to a demand for straight information, and second to "a desire to look at women's strength in action rather than (as is so often done) to lament their oppression as passive victims". It has, as a result, a breezy, pioneering, outdoor air. Most striking and representative in this sense, after the flirts, are the travellers and mountaineers, particularly those nineteenth-century ladies who exposed drawing-room mores on the icy crags. Lucy Walker (1836-1916), for instance, the first woman to climb the Matterhorn, who "generally climbed in a white print dress and liked to eat sponge cake and drink champagne on the top" or Katy Richardson (1864-1927) who "insisted on taking bread, jam and tea." The incongruities of these ladies' lives have a special power to evoke the force of Change.

Or such, at least, are the first impressions. Women like these were the ones who, if they managed to outlive their own time, got CBEs and DBEs in the end. Behind the explorers and flirts stand ranks of public women — the doctors, lawyers, educationists and philanthropists who formed pressure groups and chaired committees, and who between them outlined the range of issues (civil rights, welfare, health, equal opportunities) that occasioned women's entry into public life. A lot of them are of course bio-cross-referenced in the subject index as campaigners for women's rights, and it's on this theme that the *Dictionary* achieves its most coherent and comprehensive documentation. If you trace the lives and interconnections of figures like Elizabeth Barrett Anderson (1836-1917), a pioneer in opening up the medical professions to women, her sister Millicent Garrett Fawcett (DBE, 1847-1929), "leader of the constitutional suffrage movement", Emily Davies (1830-1921), founder of the college that became Girton, and Barbara Bodichon (1827-91), suffrage campaigner and cousin of Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), you arrive at a solid, collective story — as you do in the USA, in Australia, and so on.

The collective biography that emerges from entries of this kind has a plot about progress, hard work, courage, determination and cooperation (so that — for instance — Pankhurst rows and splits, though recorded, form merely a sensational subplot). A nineteenth-century plot, in short. However, the very traditionalism that produces this mythic effect (ie, defining achievement in terms of public recognition) generates simultaneously a closer look, a quite different set of data. If you include enough of the women who throughout history have been judged in any of the accepted terms of the word "important", then you include a lot of lives that are very hard to assimilate to the progressive plot (and that goes for later twentieth-century lives as well as biographies of Anglo-Saxon queens).

The geographical range the book attempts, too (though the emphasis is on the UK, Europe, the Commonwealth and the USA), further blurs its focus and complicates its task. Ms Uglow, perhaps acknowledging this, says "in writing it I came to realize that far from presenting a book which was representative of women's experience, I was compiling a book of deviants — independent, odd, often difficult women — who had defied the expectations of their society as to what a woman's role should be." The problem, though, is that these

"odd women" often defy the expectations of present-day feminists too. And this makes the *Dictionary* more embarrassing and in a way more interesting than first impressions suggest. The uncertainties of tone and of style, the bizarre juxtapositions of alphabetical listing produces, reveal a whole range of collisions and clashes between the "facts" (or accidents) of history and current orthodoxy.

Semi-mythic and more-or-less distant historical figures, for example, are unusually de-mythified: the Virgin Mary gets a brief, disappointed-sounding mention ("Nothing is known of Mary beyond the words of the New Testament..."); saints, unless like St Teresa of Avila they were also administrative geniuses, fare rather badly too; Pope Joan vanishes under a heap of sceptical conjecture ("According to later medieval chronicles... disguised herself as a man and went to Athens, either to follow a Benedictine monk with whom she was in love, or to obtain a degree in philosophy... Her existence was accepted until 1601"); Saint Cecilia probably owes her patronage of musicians to a mis-translation. Many of the notorious women of history — see Borgia, Lucrezia — are similarly reduced to plausibility, as pawns in political power-struggles. Unpopular figures (Catherine of Aragon) are cautiously rehabilitated; grandly wicked ones are presented undramatically — Catharine the Great, for instance, becomes a more ordinary despot, who presented herself as an enlightened ruler, while actually increasing the power of the nobility, strengthening serfdom and stifling intellectual protest. Thus, much of the time, you feel you're being talked to coolly and rationally. And then you come upon entries like that for "Artemisia of Halicarnassus (5th century BC)... the first woman sea-captain... She died tragically, throwing herself from a high cliff because of her unrequited passion for a younger man, which undo all the good work Artemisia, presumably, becomes plausible because of the scarcity of woman sea-captains, and because anyway she sounds so passionate, outdoor type. Several other only just-possible ancient women are similarly indulged because as archaists, or physiologists (as displayed progressive tendencies).

The didactic urge at work here comes out even more strongly in the treatment of some of the more shameless figures connected with the arts. George Sand, Baroness Dudevant (1804-76) is felt somehow to have had more than her due, and is irrelevantly (and backhandedly) apologized for on the grounds that "her exalted style and outspoken views on conventional marriage now seem dated". So don't be taken in by glamour. Nor by gossip: Lady Caroline Lamb is categorized (disrespectfully) as an "English writer", to rescue her from the ignominy of being an episode in Byron's story; and Frieda Lawrence becomes sardoniously recognizable as recorded, form merely a sensational subplot). A nineteenth-century plot, in short. However, the very traditionalism that produces this mythic effect (ie, defining achievement in terms of public recognition) generates simultaneously a closer look, a quite different set of data. If you include enough of the women who throughout history have been judged in any of the accepted terms of the word "important", then you include a lot of lives that are very hard to assimilate to the progressive plot (and that goes for later twentieth-century lives as well as biographies of Anglo-Saxon queens).

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More than a century of efforts from campaigners who ranged from the hymn-writer James Montgomery to a handful of enlightened master sweeps had preceded the passing of the Bill. The first of them, James Hanway, a vigorous journalist as well as a

had needed to struggle through the vicissitudes of her professional life and her four marriages."

Unless you're very spectacular indeed (like Cleopatra or — possibly — Maria Callas) you'd better not be showy. Ideally, you should combine the suspect (art and entertainment) professions with good works. Thus Margaret Atwood is given a thundering write-up: "her novels... range from wild comedy to moving studies of breakdown and combine her major concerns for the environment, the rejection of mechanistic capitalism, the protection of Canadian culture from absorption by the USA and the need for women to assert their individual identities." This list of causes echoes, of course, the kinds of concerns earlier *Dictionary* heroines were involved in, and women who directly continue that tradition like Greek writer and teacher Elly Alexiou (1896- ) are praised without reservation. "All her works bear the distinctive marks of her personal experience; they are informed by a humanitarian, loving and compassionate spirit, seeking always for truth and justice." Here we're back to hagiography surely? And even on the most local level, the confusion of "objective" and didactic aims generates continuous stylistic irritations, like the mixture of past and present tenses, and the inconsistencies in naming-conventions which leave some women as surnames, and treat others with incongruous intimacy. To take a couple of random examples: of Florence Chadwick (1919- ), the American long-distance swimmer, the text concludes confidently, "Florence became a stock-broker"; of the formidable Katharine Oraham, American newspaper proprietor, we're told in reassuring, rather headmistress fashion, "In 1963, after her husband's suicide, Katharine took over as President of the company..." A certain drift towards incoherence in some entries is perhaps also attributable to a reluctance to impart unhelpful information. Thus we're told of Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-98) that she forced herself "to the verge of breakdown by her austere habits and her intellectual experiences", and the account of the early life of Alphonsine Plessis (La Dame aux Camélias) achieves an unintentional absurdity in its efforts to sound unshocked: at fifteen "she had already had a varied career as an apprentice laundress, mistress of an elderly bachelor, servant in an inn and child prostitute".

The embarrassments attendant on the project, however, though they threaten at moments to make the book unreadable, actually do the reverse.

## Chimney slaves

Nesta Roberts

K. H. STRANGE

Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps' Apprentices 1773-1875  
144pp. Allison and Busby, £7.95.  
0 85031 431 3

Britain abolished the slave trade in her empire in 1833. The measure did nothing for the tens of thousands of children who were the victims of "legalized slavery". In nineteenth-century industrial England, it was not until 1875 that Lord Salisbury, at the third attempt, got through the House of Commons the Bill that freed perhaps the most unfortunate of them, sweeps' apprentices, the climbing boys who went where a long brush could not. The same year saw the death of the last of the many boys who were killed at their task, from suffocation, from exposure, from falls, sometimes by being literally roasted.

More than a century of efforts from campaigners who ranged from the hymn-writer James Montgomery to a handful of enlightened master sweeps had preceded the passing of the Bill. The first of them, James Hanway, a

philanthropist, had been inspired by a visit to China, where parents might murder a new-born baby, and no questions asked. Horrified, Hanway, on his return to England, looked confidently for evidence of contrasting benevolence among his fellow countrymen. He found it, for a child, admission to a workhouse or orphanage, was virtually a death sentence — sixty-four of seventy-eight children admitted to one London workhouse died before the end of the year — and that the inquiries of employers included forcing children as young as four, girls as well as boys, to climb flues nine inches square. Hanway had found his life's work.

Even with a kind and conscientious master, a sufficiently rare species, the lot of child apprentices was hideous. "No one knows the cruelty a boy has to undergo in learning", one of the better master sweeps told the Children's Employment Commission in 1863. "The flesh on elbows and knees was hardened by rubbing with 'the strongest butter'." Even so, at first they were sent back from their work with their arms and knees streaming with blood, and "the knees looking as if the caps had been pulled off." Then they were rubbed with brine again, and possibly sent off immediately to climb another chimney. "In some boys I have

found that the skin does not harden for years," said this master sweep. He added that the best age for teaching boys was about six, but he had known a boy start at four.

The children, and they were the vast majority, who were apprenticed to respectable masters might have the soles of their feet pricked, or have hay set alight beneath them to urge them upwards if they were reluctant to climb. Since they might not wash more often than once a quarter they risked developing cancer of the scrotum, caused by "sleeping black", that is, in their working clothes. The final irony was that, as early as 1803, there existed devices — capable of cleaning any chimney, with the exceptions of the demented Z turns of the drying-room chimney at Buckingham Palace and that of the Bishop of London's still-room.

Readers who rejoice in the social progress we have made since the era of the climbing boys may be stirred out of their complacency by Kathleen Strange's belief that "there are many children throughout the world who are, in this last quarter of the twentieth century, suffering as much as the climbing boys suffered." Acting on that belief, the author is giving the royalties from the sales of her book to the Save the Children Fund.

## The return to prophecy

Geza Vermes

DOW MARMUR

Beyond Survival: Reflections on the Future of Judaism  
218pp. Darton, Longman and Todd.  
£7.95.  
0 232 51456 9

Prior to the Holocaust, few Jews, if any, seriously doubted that Judaism had a future. Outrages inspired in the distant and not so distant past by anti-Semitism — say, the massacres by the Crusaders or the pogroms of Tsarist Russia — could be and were seen as affording historical proof of Jewish indestructibility. Auschwitz has shattered this faith and a large question-mark has been placed against Judaism's cherished concept of a loving and caring paternal deity. In consequence, from the middle of the present century survival has been the alpha and omega of Jewish concern, even generating a new literary genre, that of Holocaust studies, especially in North America where Jewish theologians continue to devote much paper and ink to sketches of the face of God after Auschwitz. The Canadian Jewish philosopher, Emil Fackenheim, has promoted to first importance a 614th commandment additional to the 613 biblical precepts: "Thou shalt not allow Hitler a posthumous victory" (by permitting the remnants of Auschwitz to be annihilated through assimilation or the activities of antisemitism).

It goes almost without saying that this same issue of the survival and future of Judaism is also at the centre of a significant book by Dow Marmur, a leading British Reform rabbi. However, as title and sub-title make clear, he looks beyond mere physical, racial, national continuance for a purpose that will enable Judaism to endure as a faith. In the past, the usual dilemma was how to be Jewish, how to address himself to the question of why be Jewish, why remain Jewish. His aim is to diagnose the crisis of contemporary Judaism in order to discover recipes for recovery and for a long and healthy future.

Explaining how the three branches of Jewry — orthodox, progressive (Reform and Liberal) and Zionist — have been attempting to outdo one another in securing Jewish survival, Marmur tells us that they have all failed. Isolationist Orthodoxy seeks to safeguard Judaism by denying the modern world and withdrawing from it. Reform Judaism, sprung from Emancipation and at home in the Western world, leaves the door wide open to an assimilation that can be as lethal as the death-camps. "The children of those who did not perish in Auschwitz... may now cease to be Jews as they graduate from Oxford. It is a devastating shock to the exponent of Emancipation that both

towns may have the same effect on the future of Judaism." As for Zionism, by offering Jews a secular haven from assimilation in a Jewish state, it relegates religion to the background and simultaneously increases the threat of anti-Jewish/anti-Israeli hostility. One negative characteristic common to all three varieties is the promotion of what Marmur calls "pious Judaism" in which the majority provide only moral or financial support. No more than the minority actively demonstrate integrity, religious or otherwise.

In the author's judgment, there is a danger that the "survival syndrome" tends to confuse God with the Jewish people, to lead them to a worship of themselves or their Jewish state. Instead of the Creator. He quotes the ancient legend according to which Satan tried to dissuade Abraham from offering his only son on Mount Moriah with the argument that fulfilment of the divine command would leave the elderly patriarch without posterity. To this Abraham is said to have retorted: "My task is to do the will of the Holy One; he can look after the problem of Jewish survival."

Rabbi Marmur, in other words, wishes above all to reform the religious outlook of Judaism. Calling for a return to the true spirit of prophecy, he reminds his readers that in biblical antiquity the prophetic revolution proceeded on three fronts. It attacked the complacency of false prophets, the ritualism of the priests and the secularism of the kings. Reform Judaism, his own denomination, is a false prophet in as much as it offers its adherents what they want. Orthodoxy, with its strict observance of the Law, reflects the biblical priesthood, more in new revelation. Zionism represents the interest of the king or the state. All three are in need of radical prophetic reshaping.

Here Marmur turns for inspiration to Martin Buber, a modernist opponent of Reform, a critic of Orthodoxy yet an expert in the Jewish past, a life-long Zionist who refused to identify the Jewish state with political power. Following in Buber's footsteps, Marmur sees the essence of prophetic Judaism to reside in dialogue: it is by means of human encounters that we address and are addressed by God. Judaism's future is ensured if the individual Jew remains able and willing to wrestle with God as Jacob wrestles with his mysterious attacker in the book of Genesis. At the same time, this future must entail a re-adaptation to contemporary needs of the Torah-Law of Scripture, since Judaism as a historical phenomenon is an amalgam of prophetic-Pharisaic preaching and teaching and priestly-rabbinic obedience and practice. Such a readjustment is to be effected, we are told, by the democratic depletion of the Jewish people.

Marmur sits on the fence where there is question of whether diaspora

Jews should stay in the Gentile world or migrate to Israel. Prepared to "slog with equal honesty and fervour" to "save the Queen" and "Ha-Tiqvah", he preaches loyalty to the country in which he lives and concern for his Jewish brethren everywhere, especially in Israel. He does not believe in a divine election. God did not choose the Jews, he insists; the Jews chose God. Election is not racial, but moral. It springs from personal commitment: a view that echoes, I should add, the teaching of the prophets and prophetic-apocalyptic sectarianism such as Essenism and primitive Christianity.

In short, if Judaism is to have a future, its factions must join together to form a "greater Israel", one that will consist, furthermore, not only of Gentiles actually converted to Judaism, but of Jews and Christians (and maybe Muslims and communists?) co-existing and co-operating with one another in peace. For in accordance with prophetic universalism, Marmur believes that whatever is true and genuine in Judaism, must have a meaning for religion as such and an applicability to the world at large.

Beyond Survival will appeal primarily to Jews who look for a renewal of Judaism. But it is obvious throughout that Marmur is aware of the wider issues raised by his analysis of the Jewish predicament. Yet perhaps because of his burning concern with Judaism, or even because of his anxiety over hostile reactions from less progressive minded Jews, he accepts certain statements as axiomatic, leaving them unexamined. It follows that here and there a major insight remains undeveloped. He repeatedly asserts, for instance, that there can be no Judaism without Jews (and few insiders would disagree with him), and although not opposed to proselytization on a small scale ("too open an approach may jeopardize the distinctive character of Judaism"), he is convinced that Judaism must be a practical and ethical point of view that may be so. But if Judaism, as he argues so eloquently, is more than the traditional way of life of an ancient people, and if it presupposes a spiritual world-view, a dialogue between man, the universe and God, should it not also postulate a total openness which will enable it to be embraced by one and all if so moved by the spirit? In fact, Rabbi Marmur's fascinating concept of a "greater Israel", diffidently alluded to again and again in these pages, points to the same age-old vision of one of the greatest of our prophets:

"Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage" (Isaiah 19:25).

Occasionally repetitive, and even then a little short-sighted and over-the-top, this is a honest, tactful and thoughtful book that deserves careful study by a wide readership, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

## Given a Flower

A field of grief

Ella Pybus

1  
In the violet fixes an acid leaf  
through the smaller of two petals:  
this life,  
its exact strong  
sorrow of pain. You said, look,  
these petals,  
their mauve scuffed paper, a hua  
gettlog pale. From your yard

each mauve flinching shape of light, you said,  
mixes with the pale, the polid  
dark of a spring night. Look,  
holding out your thin hands  
the foggers baw, those flowers,  
whose the mauve, dense  
fictions of twilight, streaked  
with flingers,  
the pale, livid nighttime?

2  
An insapable form  
the mauve petal, its hem puckered — the mauve fish.  
No, you spoke, no. Furtive  
huntsress, out of the bee goes for it, but virgin,  
and like a priest,  
you admoiled love. The violet  
shuts, in the verge in which it roots.  
A whole earthen cavern of music  
a vacuum of it. With dreams  
of lovelessness,  
as the moon's shade peals off it.

A field of grief  
in this snowy, glum light. You said, 'this is not  
a future.' In this republic,  
aching with snow, you walked  
unsteadily away.

3  
In this tarnished leaf plotted in the over-side  
of the smaller of two petals,  
the violet's life flickers. The flower  
extinguishes like a lamp.  
It is a penitential bloom,  
the spring's want incessant  
as the giving which flinches.

It is over nighttime. Its curd, that is a kind of dew,  
pale to the male sex:  
I have nothing to do  
with the acid sex of the violet.

Forms of grief  
aspergo the southern night, its salt sprigs  
of blossom, dogwood,  
this twisted star-shape, in whose hollows  
salt curds,

Loula Villa — Newcastle, 1982  
Jon Silkin

UP 11.15.50



# Twenty for the Eighties

Hugh Haughton

BLAKE MORRISON and ANDREW MOTION (Editors)  
The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry  
206pp. Penguin. £1.95.  
0 14 042 283 8

If twentieth-century poetic history has been written largely in terms of generations and decades, then it is anthologies that have been most influential in creating the public identity of each generation. The new Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry edited by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion sets out to do for the present generation what Michael Roberts's *New Signatures* (1932) did for the 1930s, Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956) did for the Movement, and A. Alvarez's *The New Poetry* (1962) did for the turbulent 1960s. As manifestos of the rising young, these become in turn the tombstones to the dying generations at their song. They offer soon-dated maps of the "contemporary", validated by the tradition of the new, and provide the public with the latest identikit portrait of the poetic Zeitgeist. The fate of the earlier anthologies confirms our need for such composite identities, however fictitious – individual poems are hard to read – but also suggests that they need to be challenged.

This latest anthology is no exception. It has already been widely challenged – which is just as well, since what is at stake is the direction of our poetry, the terms of the poetic licence. The editors claim in their introduction that there has been a "decisive shift of sensibility" in the last fifteen years, following a "spell of lethargy" in the 1960s when poets lagged behind novelists and dramatists. The result is a "new spirit in British Poetry", originally launched from the North of Ireland, "marked by greater imaginative freedom and linguistic daring", and requiring a "reformation of poetic taste". The anthology has been designed to represent this renaissance and elicit that reform. The twenty poets it has included are said to exhibit not only "something of the spirit of post-modernism" but a "common purpose: to extend the imaginative franchise". In other words the shift of sensibility that has been "undergone" – poets are of course patients, not agents – is just what we have wanted: both democratic and avant-garde, a kind of Post-Modernist Great Reform Bill.

In the revised preface to *The New Poetry* Alvarez ruefully acknowledged a "discrepancy between the generally rather sober verse and the influential and more radical" – a similar discrepancy is evident here – though the editors' tone is much more bland. But the poems just don't bear out their claims. Most are recognizably the kind of poems that have been turned out for decades, some of the best have a great deal in common with the work of the previous generation, and very few look like posing a serious challenge to the conventions under which poetry is written nowadays (poetic revolutions are nearly always marked by changes in rhythmic imagination, and I see none here). The editors' decision not to reprint any of those poets who had the misfortune to be classified by Alvarez as "new" shows the historical record, anyway, and cuts out too many good poets. Even Alvarez, though not renowned for catholicity of taste, drew on the work of eight poets who had already figured in *New Lines*: the anthology whose "genetic" ethos he was trying to make obsolete. By rulling out Geoffrey Hill, Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, Peter Porter and Charles Tomlinson – much of whose best work has been published since 1962 – the editors drastically diminish the meaning of "contemporary". Or are they implying that *The Whitman Weddings*, *King Log* and *Crow* are examples of the "lethargy" that overcame British poetry in the 1960s? The question illustrates the problems posed by this new version of recent poetic history – and the editors' failure to acknowledge some of the major figures excluded from their brand new ark, among them the most inescapably powerful contemporary poet, Geoffrey Hill. This has been an ironic

feature of the big anthologies since the war – their tendency to leave out the best poems, either because of length, generational lag, or prejudice (witness Larkin's and Enright's Oxford anthologies): if you look through them you will find little later Auden, nothing of Bunting's *Briggflatts* or late David Jones, nothing from "Furoral Music" or even *Crow*.

The twenty poets who are included are hard to see as anything like a single historical unit tending in one direction – even as defined by so vague a notion as "something of the spirit of post-modernism". The editors characterize them as follows:

Typically they show a greater imaginative freedom and linguistic daring than the previous poetic generation. . . . They have developed a degree of ludic and literary self-consciousness reminiscent of the modernists. . . . as a way of making the familiar strange again, they have exchanged the idea of the poet as the person-next-door, or knowing insider, for the attitude of the anthropologist or alien invader or remembering exile. . . . It is a change of outlook which expresses itself in some poems, in a preference for metaphor and poetic bizzarerie to metonymy and plain speech; in others. . . . in a renewed interest in narrative. . . . It manifests in other words a preoccupation with relativism – which represents a radical departure from the empirical mode (of the 1950s and 60s). . . . It reasserts the primacy of the imagination in poetry. . . .

If you add up these comparative oppositions, you get both an inflated claim for the present and a systematic devaluation of the past generation (curiously, a conflation of the Movement's "post-war constraint" and Alvarez's "confessional white heat"). Was the poetry of the 1960s quite so grey and "empirical" as all this implies? And is the present so imaginatively anthropological? Individual examples suggest not. Do Peter Scupham and Christopher Reid show more "linguistic daring" or Andrew Motion more "imaginative freedom" than Ted Hughes after *Crow*? Do Craig Raine and David Sweetman show more "literary self-consciousness" than Geoffrey Hill in "Mercian Hymns"? Do Tom Paulin and Douglas Dunn write a less "plain speech" than the previous generation? Which poet included here uses more poetic bizzarerie, than, say, Stevie Smith? Is Anne Stevenson really more "ludic" than Peter Porter? How does a "preoccupation with relativism" result in a preference for narrative and metaphor? And is Seamus Heaney ("the end of art is peace") more of a relativist than Philip Larkin ("how we live measures our own nature")? The editors qualify their description by "typically", and no doubt individual poems correspond to particular characterizations, but I cannot be alone in wondering if this isn't a breach of the Trades Descriptions Act. "In the face of manifesto-making", as the editors properly observe, "a degree of scepticism is only proper."

Such a tendentious version of literary history derives from the desire to give aesthetic coherence to the twenty selected poets – and to promote the "narrative" mode of Andrew Motion himself and the new wave of Marxist materialists associated with Craig Raine (with which Blake Morrison has affinities). The introduction imposes the "ludic" poetic of the latter on the anthology as a whole – using Seamus Heaney as a prestigious unifying poetic godfather. The editors might have done better to compile an anthology of metropolitan "Marxists" – seven of their poets, if you include Medbh McGuckian and Paul Muldoon, could easily be grouped together in this way – prefaced by an award of the greatest divide between them and the Ulster poets. O. Heaney's generation, whose affinities are with earlier writers, and I find it ironic that Heaney should be chosen as their patron – under the "British" flag of the title. His poetry exemplifies the convergence of personal memory (to all its fortiority) and cultural history (located through the "auditory

imagination" and the poetic artefact): a stance far removed from the kinds of internal emigration preferred by the new wave. This may in part be due to his sense of belonging, the gravitation of his grave manner to the matter of Ireland as a whole. The British label sits oddly on a poet who "emigrated" south of the border, and indeed wrote the poems of *North and Fiddwork* there – "Viking Dublin" is the necessary complement to the northern bog-poems, a characteristic act of local piety. It is perhaps an embarrassed recognition of this which makes the editors choose "Leavings" – an autumnal picture of Ely, plump with reminiscences of Lawrentian Englishness, as well as an elegy for Catholic England – rather than such anti-colonial conceits as "Ocean's Love to Ireland" or "Act of Union". The anthology is much the richer for Heaney's genuinely exposed "Exposure", and his casually ceremonious, self-questioning elegy "Casualty" – but he seems terribly out of place in it, part of a different history.

The attempt to extend the "imaginative franchise" centres on four broad categories: the working-class (Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison), women (five in all), the Northern Irish (of both persuasions) and Marxists (usually based in London or Oxford). With the exception of the last, these are familiar categories in the history of political restriction in Britain, even if the idea of the poetic ballot-box is out. Since all poetry is an attempt to broaden the terms of the imagination's treaties with the world, it is hard to think of poems as imaginative votes unless their concern is directly political – and only Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison and Jeffrey Wainwright are overtly concerned with a reading of history to which the idea of the franchise is relevant (the women's poems conspicuously aren't). To speak of "franchise" where the licence of Christopher Reid's whole school of bourgeois primitivism is concerned must be intellectually suspect. All the same, putting Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison together – they might be called The School of Eloquent Barbarians – is perhaps the most informative feature of the anthology. Harrison and Dunn are examples of upward social mobility who yet seek to invent poetic forms that are downwardly mobile enough to dramatize their identification with working-class traditions which have no place in the established poetic tongue, but without sacrificing their own literacy. Harrison, exploring "the Cat Street conspirator", quotes a very bad hand at rhyming – "Sir, I have a redempting a misspelling as a political diagnosis in its own right (or writing)". The editors are justified in making more of Dunn's recent, historically circumstantial work than they do of the early exercises in saddened sociological voyeurism, which look rather dated now. I admire the polemical rhetoric of "Empires" and "Gardener" – the first for its mandarin epigrammatism in protesting against the "dread imperia" on behalf of those who "file its uniforms", the second for its attempt to appropriate the Marvellian tradition in order to represent the silenced gardeners in the green shades. Nevertheless, it is difficult to be a Dryden of the dispossessed, and too often Dunn's assertions of meaning pre-empt empathy and political complexity. Tony Harrison's poems are wittier and show off more, but they too exploit literary tradition on behalf of the exploited – the huge cast of unscripted extras he calls the Rhubarbarians, the mute, inglorious Miltons, the "make it stange" – and its introduction is largely written by their poetry in mind. But though Raine's "Postcard" uses the device of an "alien invader", the poem is more a sol-fa parlour game than an exercise in anthropology – its appeal is precisely to the knowing insider who can decode its elaborate metaphors. Raine's exotic similes are updated. Anglo-Saxon riddles celebrating domesticity, rather than views from the outside the Allen is palpably the person-next-door to fancy-decor, and thrilled by the bravura of his disguise. Of course the tricks with similes played



"Oracular Sibyl" by Leonard Baskin, 1978; an etching and aquatint included in the exhibition of prints, drawings and sculpture "Homage to Leonard Baskin – a tribute to his 60th birthday". The exhibition has been shown at the Reading Museum and Ari Gallery and the Ulster Museum, Belfast; a selection from it can be seen at Leinster Fine Art, 9 Henrietta Road, London W2, from February 13 to March 20.

defeats. Jeffrey Wainwright's historical sequences owe more to Hill's example – though they radicalize it – but the fact that he is able to write an unironic "Hymn to Liberty" is a measure of his strange isolation in the anthology as a whole.

None of the five women poets makes a great impact, or seems interested in such histories – at least not on their showing here. Anne Stevenson's poems are sensitive anecdotes, letters, portraits; Medbh McGuckian's are domestic-erotic reveries of the interior; only Fleur Adcock's "The Ex-Queen among the Astronomers" is a piece of irrelevant, baroque, erotic playfulness, seems more "ludic" than diurnally "empirical".

Among the Ulster contingent – including Tom Paulin, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon – the poet I most admire is Derek Mahon. Inhabiting a bleak landscape of exposed backstreets and exposed headlands, he is a type of intellectual *bricoleur*, with a cunningly pragmatic approach to verse-forms and a range of historical allusion and philosophical curiosity noticeably absent in the other "new" poets. For Mahon unlikely subjects become occasions for wry ontological investigations; he writes most enduringly of displaced persons (like himself), derelict places, and obsolescent things – as in his poems about quasi-metaphysical emblems of man's place in the universe. The resourcefulness and intellectual passion of his poems "The Apotheosis of Tios", "The Banished Gods" and "Oo, a Disused Shed in County Wexford" redeem much that is instantly obsolete about the present anthology. He is one of the three or four poets who justify its existence.

In the end, however, the anthology is likely to be seen as an apology for the final group – the "Marxists", Craig Raine, Christopher Reid and David Sweetman. It ends with four poets who "make it stange" – and its introduction is largely written by their poetry in mind. But though Raine's "Postcard" uses the device of an "alien invader", the poem is more a sol-fa parlour game than an exercise in anthropology – its appeal is precisely to the knowing insider who can decode its elaborate metaphors. Raine's exotic similes are updated. Anglo-Saxon riddles celebrating domesticity, rather than views from the outside the Allen is palpably the person-next-door to fancy-decor, and thrilled by the bravura of his disguise. Of course the tricks with similes played

by Raine and Reid have a solemn intent – they research the "troop of objects" in the "museum of ordinary art"; they celebrate the "sacraments and luxuries" of the everyday world, composing a kind of sentimental atlas equivalent of the pastoral idyll, a "peaceable kingdom" out of the "orderly debris". Our respect for Reid puts it, "Is the Book of Fate," through simile they reduce the world to a series of discrete visual puns everything in this poetry exists to be compared to something else: "as red" "like" litter the pages of Raine, Reid, McGuckian and Sweetman the so many staples. Sweetman has picked up many of these marian mannequins, but his seems less enthralled by them than the world they innocently celebrate. His poems register the shock of history, suggesting that pure visually is a false innocence; but in "Looking in the Deep End" he is still left fixated the "innocent game of green-glass chess" which conceals reality. This seems to me an apt emblem of the limitations of the manner: the warping and relativistic assumptions while all moralizing everything to a set of absolute values, having it both ways. In fact, in true Victorian style, Deirdre in due course becomes a famous medium, and the narrator refers freely to "Spirit World" and its inhabitants. Octavia marries; and the narrator is enabled to witness the *unlucky act* of matrimony without loss of decorum, since his progress is purged by the sacrament. Is this not orthodox?

*Melodrama* in any case depends on the evils that it claims to deplore, while inevitably dramatizes the arbitrary nature of style. The two elements, each of them threatening to performances (such as "The King Fisher's Boxing-Gloves" and "A spare, inclusive political elegy" in German Requiem) and "The Notebook" represent a real poetic imagination, witty but coloured by some of the more terrible events of the century. Though the anthology, for its usefulness as a reference point, misrepresents recent poetic history, at least help to make Fenton and Mahon, as well as Heaney, more available. Fenton's "German Requiem" is one of the few modern English poems to stand beside the best of modern German poetry, in its search to define "It is not what they built. It is what they knocked down" and says:

It is not what he wants to know. It is what he wants not to know. It is not what they say. It is what they do not say.

## Gilding the unmentionables

Adam Mars-Jones

JOYCE CAROL OATES  
*A Bloodmoon Romance*  
615pp. Cape. £9.95.  
0 21 029 43 6

Joyce Carol Oates's new book is an outlined pastiche of Victorian novels, a revisionist melodrama full of teasing detail.

The events which befall the Zinn family between 1879 and 1899 are cinematic enough in all conscience. Deirdre, the youngest of five daughters, is kidnapped in full view of her sisters in an outlaw balloon of black silk. Being an adopted child, and of a somewhat difficult temperament, Deirdre has never been popular, but the family nevertheless dissolves after her disappearance. Constance Philippa, the eldest, runs away on her wedding night; Malvinia, the priestess, elopes with an actor and adopts his profession. Even Samantha, whose resistance to marriage has seemed absolute (since she prefers to help her famous father, John Quincy Zinn, with his experiments), eventually runs off with his lab assistant Nahum. Only Octavia remains at Bloodmoon with her parents, to make a suitable marriage.

All this Joyce Carol Oates describes in a gilded prose to match the Gilded Age, lapsing only occasionally into "best-selling" into anachronism. She includes real people in her fiction (Edison, Twain, Wilde, Blavatsky), and borrows experiments made by Nikola Tesla (alternating current, the electric chair) to lend to her creature J. Q. Zinn, who makes very free with Gothic props, what with lightning, supernatural interventions, and a pet ape that is all but human.

Her cleverness, though, lies in appropriating the Victorian narrative method for her own ends; her book relies entirely on hindsight, but is too easy to draw on it directly. Her narrative, although unnamed, is explicitly a sinister local to Bloodmoon, and yet with her elaborate professions of knowledge and of ignorance, her confident disclaimers of authority, her troubled avowals of the impropriety of proceeding, the *unlucky act* of stopping short, she contrives to give a full picture of the Victorian unmentionables, not excluding violence, sex, spiritualism, insanity, feminism and the theatre.

Victorian hypocrisy, in this book, is perceived not as a flaw, nor even as a vice, but as the organizing principle of the century; hypocrisy which allows the "innocent game of green-glass chess" which conceals reality. This seems to me an apt emblem of the limitations of the manner: the warping and relativistic assumptions while all moralizing everything to a set of absolute values, having it both ways. In fact, in true Victorian style, Deirdre in due course becomes a famous medium, and the narrator refers freely to "Spirit World" and its inhabitants. Octavia marries; and the narrator is enabled to witness the *unlucky act* of matrimony without loss of decorum, since his progress is purged by the sacrament. Is this not orthodox?

*Melodrama* in any case depends on the evils that it claims to deplore, while inevitably dramatizes the arbitrary nature of style. The two elements, each of them threatening to performances (such as "The King Fisher's Boxing-Gloves" and "A spare, inclusive political elegy" in German Requiem) and "The Notebook" represent a real poetic imagination, witty but coloured by some of the more terrible events of the century. Though the anthology, for its usefulness as a reference point, misrepresents recent poetic history, at least help to make Fenton and Mahon, as well as Heaney, more available. Fenton's "German Requiem" is one of the few modern English poems to stand beside the best of modern German poetry, in its search to define "It is not what they built. It is what they knocked down" and says:

It is not what he wants to know. It is what he wants not to know. It is not what they say. It is what they do not say.

(358 yards, or some three-quarters of a mile.  
This dramatizes atrophied overproduction far less successfully than the endless lists of clothes in wardrobes and trousseaux, and the shame felt by the indigent Zinns at needing a fortnightly and not a half-yearly wash; that absurd antimacassar is the invention of a mischievous sensibility inimical to the bulk of the book.

Another failed coup is the description of Constance Philippa's wedding-night, when she leaves a dressmaker's dummy in the marital bed, only after sexual congress does her husband detect the substitution. The point being made, that the sexual virtues of the Victorian wife (namely *innuobility*, and the appropriate *innuobility*) were shared by the mannequin on which her clothes were modelled, is no bad one, but is better established by the self-subverting confidence of the narrative voice than by the disruption of a plausible story.

Victorian sexuality is in fact admirably dramatized in the stories of Malvinia, Octavia and Constance Philippa. As an actress, Malvinia is of course little better than a prostitute, and she does consort sexually with a number of men; but even in these circumstances it is taken for granted that the act will take place in total darkness, and that the woman will

remain perfectly still. Malvinia's own desire is intolerable not only to her partners but to herself, and she ascribes it with loathing to "the Beast".

Meanwhile Octavia is being subjected to a series of perverse assaults by her husband, but since she has not been taught to associate sex with pleasure, she does not construe pain and grotesquery as abnormal. In bed she wears a chemise, two covers, a corset (highly laced), half a dozen petticoats and fifty yards or so of trimming; a hood is placed over her head, and drawn tight round her neck. Sometimes her husband beats her with wet gloves; sometimes he raps her bosom with a fan. Later in their married life he adds a noose, though he comes to prefer wearing it himself, and having Octavia (still of course hooded) tighten it for him. If she stops tightening (if for example he becomes unable to speak), he punishes her.

None of this activity prevents Octavia from regarding the *unlucky act* as the *pangensis* of value, the *epiphane* and *pleroma* of life; and these passages, done with a very deadpan black comedy, are the most successful in the book.

No wonder Constance Philippa runs from the marriage bed, and her solution, which involves posing as a man and moving to the West, has an appealing thoroughness; particularly as it is clear that the difficulties of being

a woman in this society, forced to learn fancywork and Longfellow, weighed down and constricted by asphyxiating costumes, chaperoned, huddled and ignored, are hardly less than the difficulties of being a cross-dressed Western outlaw, expert at sharpshooting and stud poker.

When Constance Philippa returns to Bloodmoon, as *Mr Philippe Fox*, only to clope with her child and sweetheart Delphine, she altogether flummoxes the narrator. Since she is behaving as a man, she must have become sexually male during her exile, and the narrator spends some pages analysing the causes of this genital transformation. Tight-fitting trousers, profland and tequila seem the most likely culprits.

*A Bloodmoon Romance* addresses itself to a broad tract of history and to a great number of literary models, with varying results: its messiness, though necessary for many of its effects, is not always sustained, and its conclusion is disappointing. But it has a good many successes, and represents a real attempt to recreate a period which produced an extraordinary range of attitudes, from Emerson's idealistic fervour to Twain's bilious nihilism, and to detect the similarities underlying the differences; to reconstruct the nineteenth century with the knowledge of the twentieth, and to use only the original materials.

## Doubling the ecstasy

Peter Kemp

JOHN HAWKES

Virginia

215pp. Chatto and Windus. £8.50.  
0 7011 3908 0

John Hawkes's new novel, *Virginia*, is a book about eroticism that seems more concerned with doubling than coupling. Taking pains to mirror earlier models – from the troubadours to Georges Bataille – it also offers matching narratives; both recounted by Virginia, a girl in her eleventh year and at the eleventh hour of her innocence.

In the more contemporary story, set in 1945, Virginia lives with her brother in a rambling edifice on the site of a burnt-out chateau. Here, as her mother lies upstairs, mute and paralysed, Virginia witnesses "charades of love" acted out by five very different women. The story concludes with a dual climax: Virginia's brother makes love to her, and her mother, breaking out of paralysis at last, burns down the house – the flames of which merge into the heat of Virginia's awakened sexuality.

The other narrative takes place in 1740. This, Hawkes reminds us, was the year de Sade was born; and, accordingly, these sections both emulate and travesty his world. This situation is familiar: a group of women in a secluded estate and placed at the disposal of a despot male. But the atmosphere is, in all ways, less oppressive. Instead of the brutal conglomeration of de Sade, avidly assembled, his Lego-kil copulations are replaced by something more gracefully symbolic. There is more discourse than intercourse.

Between the two narratives, parallels proliferate. Lines and images recur. The culmination – having wrecked by an avenging mother – is the same in both. And the women involved in the erotic tableaux likewise seem counterparts across the centuries. In the 1740 story, they are endowed with allegorical names, Finesse, Colère, Magic, Volupté, Bel Esprit; and delicacy, anger, magic, voluptuousness and wit are, respectively, the main qualities displayed by the five modern women.

The chief difference between the two stories is one of tone. Exuberant and surreal, the contemporary episodes are livelier. The eighteenth-century story, invested with an emblematic eroticism, is gawked by the plot protocol. Virginia is gawked by the passion for symmetry and need for

order" shown by Seigneur, the master of the Chateau de Sade. And within this labyrinthine dwelling, life is elaborately patterned. Even breakfast is a masterpiece of neatness: at a table decorated with three yellow roses, each diner is served with a large egg, a tiny bird, and a chicken's thigh, arranged in an elegant composition – the "golden thigh prepared and trimmed so as to be precisely the size of egg and little bird", "the yolks of the eggs . . . soft syrup of flowing shades of yellow and orange . . . exactly matching the melting brass colour of little bird, thigh and chicken, and the three roses".

Visual rhymes and chromatic echoes of this kind constantly pull the book's material into shapes of weird beauty. And they also harmonize with the novel's insistence on balance as the essence of the erotic. Many of the disciplines Seigneur imposes are designed to curb excess in one direction or another: careless power is rectified by careful domination; the poetic is pushed instructively amongst the animal; debauchery is played against religious repression. In keeping with this concern for equilibrium, the prose often has the pose of a *peut-être*: "Innocence is the clarity with which the self shows forth the self. Love is the respect we feel for innocence." And there are some very formal fables, such as Seigneur's allegory about the lover's progress from the Plain of Indifference

to the Citadel of the Desire to Please, where "Everything is held in its proper place, attains its balance and hence its meaning".

Not that the book is thinly diagrammatic. It is saved from this by the lush accuracy of Hawkes's prose. Virginia speaks at one point of "the clarity of my morning perceptions", going on to illustrate this by noting how the very veins in the leaves of all the greenery in the enormous stone pots lining the corridors reached fifty eyes as if in magnification, all those tiny veins as hard and sparse as the shining legs of little birds". This microscopic receptivity – fresh, inventive, and alert – pervades the book. It gives everything an unusual immediacy, whether Hawkes is writing of "red roses . . . so dark that they resembled eggs stripped into broad soft petals of purpling blood" or of a mass of dismembered deer: "It loosened . . . and developed shadows in this glistening mound and then, and then, in the slowest motion, began to slide away, slide down, flow from the cavity like a stream of cold honey from the lip of a crock . . . All that had been solid was now loose and soft. Intricacy lay at our feet in disarrangement. The doe was empty." Precise and resonant, delicate even in its accounts of the grossly physical, *Virginia* is not only a shapely erotic fantasy; it is also a work of potent poetry.

## Paperbacks in brief

WILKIE COLLINS

*The Hounded Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice*

127pp. Dover. £2.40.  
0 48624333 8

One of Collins's later stories (first published in 1878), *The Hounded Hotel* is almost all plot; in its short span Collis manipulates a large cast of characters through a highly complex and ingenious murder story. The style and technique are very melodramatic indeed; and though the writing is often mechanical, its central tenets are interestingly and self-consciously ironized by the mysterious Countess Narona, who determines much of the action and is herself of an extreme and histrionic temperament. Her final revelation of the mystery takes the form of a synopsis for a play which, essentially this novella itself, but transposed into an even more villainous register.

DENTON WELCH

*In Youth is Pleasure*

154pp. Oxford University Press. £2.50.  
0 19281363 3

This was Denton Welch's second novel, first published in 1945. With no plot to speak of, it describes a summer vacation spent by a schoolboy, Orvil Pym, at a country hotel. Not only does it evoke Welch's own adolescence but from the vantage of his brief invalid adulthood it displays an extraordinary intensity of physical reaction to a world from which he was increasingly isolated, and a sharpness of physical need which is rendered in a controlled, direct and economical manner. The novel's world is full of oddities – peacocks, a dilapidated garden buildings, bizarre bric-a-brac – but it is at its most intense when evoking Orvil's idealized yearnings towards the robust ordinariness of a group of holidaying boys from the East End.

A.J.G.H.

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# Fingers on the trigger

P. J. Parish

JAMES W. CLARKE

American Assassins: The Darker Side of Politics  
321pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £13.90.  
0 691 07637 5

The act of assassination is regarded as evidence of the insanity of the assassin; therefore all such killers or would-be killers must be mad. This is the circular argument which James W. Clarke seeks to break in this readable and thought-provoking study. Reduction of the explanation of assassination to such a simple formula is the result, he suggests, of a conjunction - almost a conspiracy - between the politicians' pursuit of expediency and the psychiatrists' narrowness of vision. It is comforting for politicians and governments to explain away assassinations as the work of the mentally deranged, rather than as the expression of genuine political grievance. It is the predictable result of the professional training and cast of mind of psychiatrists that they should explain any deviation from social norms in pathological terms, and should focus upon the personality of the assassin rather than on other, external influences. Professor Clarke argues that the political, social and cultural contexts of such crimes warrant at least as much consideration, and he disputes the proposition that assassination is by definition an insane or irrational act.

John Hinckley's attempt on the life of President Reagan occurred when work on this book was almost completed, but Clarke examines the nine previous attempts (four of them successful) on the lives of eight different incumbent presidents, as well as three attempts to assassinate presidential candidates (Theodore Roosevelt, Robert Kennedy and George Wallace), one attack upon a president-elect (Franklin Roosevelt), and two other murders of prominent public figures, Huey Long and Martin Luther King. Such acts have become much more common in the past fifty years. On Clarke's reckoning, the only presidents since FDR who have not been the target for such an attack are Eisenhower, Johnson and Carter. Is there some kind of imitative, or epidemic effect at work here? It is

The most interesting and important,

worth noting that Arthur Bremer, who shot George Wallace, had read books on the assassination of Robert Kennedy, and John Hinckley was apparently much affected by the film *Taxi Driver*, in which the leading male character has affinities with Bremer. On the other hand, the random element in the selection of victims is illustrated by the fact that Bremer stalked Nixon before turning his attention to Wallace, while Giuseppe Zangara intended to kill Herbert Hoover until he happened to read in his Miami newspaper that Roosevelt would be in town next day. Ironically, Gerald Ford who might be a popular nomination as the most anonymous or innocuous president of modern times was a target twice in three weeks, while Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, the two most vilified and controversial of modern presidents, were never exposed to direct attack.

Clarke provides a biographical sketch of each of the assassins or would-be assassins, set in the political and social context of their times. He is at his best on some of the more recent cases - Oswald in particular (where he makes good points against the various conspiracy theories) and also Sirhan Sirhan, James Earl Ray, and the most unlikely member of this motley crew of murderers, Carl Weiss, devoted family man and successful young doctor, who shot Huey Long in 1935. The treatment of some of the earlier assassins is less impressive, partly because the author's grasp of the historical background is often less assured. It is not just a matter of minor factual errors; it is rather, for example, that the whole attempt to demonstrate that Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, was not insane or deranged but politically motivated and rational, rests on the portrayal of the president, not as a national hero but as a tyrant, "the unpopular Mr Lincoln" of James G. Randall's description, while his assassin emerges, not as a failed actor thirsting for recognition, but as a popular and successful actor, loved by all who knew him. This is surely to replace one gross oversimplification by another. Some of the evidence quoted from Booth's letters is in itself enough to raise serious doubts about his mental condition. The worthy objective of setting these crimes in their social and political context needs to be pursued with more rigour and more historical awareness than is apparent in this and some other cases.

One can only express admiration for this bold attempt to provide a typology of assassination. If it succeeds in establishing the ground for serious debate of this whole thorny problem, it will have served a valuable purpose. But any such attempt to classify assassins into a few basic types must inevitably and quickly run into a whole minefield of difficulties. Even among his relatively small group of assassins, Clarke has to identify two - Weiss and Ray - as "atypical" who conform to none of his four types. With an honesty which does him credit, he admits that the two women who attacked Gerald Ford - Lynette Fromme and Sara Jane Moore - fit only very uneasily into his second category. Clarke also places Oswald firmly in his second category, and yet Oswald's record of political activism is not easy to reconcile with the statement that the "neurotic Type II assassin" is concerned "only secondarily with causes or ideals". Having emphasized the emotional problems of Oswald, Clarke has to play down the evidence of Sirhan's disturbed mental state - including evidence from his notebooks quoted in

though not necessarily the most convincing, part of Clarke's book is his classification of assassins into four main types, on a scale which leads from the most rational to the most obviously insane. First are those ready to sacrifice their own lives for a political ideal; the extremism of a Booth or a Czolgosz (who killed McKinley) or a Sirhan Sirhan is regarded as rational, selfless, principled. The second type consists of those, like Lee Harvey Oswald, who act out of an overwhelming need for acceptance and recognition; they are anxious, depressed people with very low estimates of themselves, who seek to satisfy their craving for attention by projecting their problems on to the public figures who become their targets. Third are the psychopaths (or sociopaths), like George Wallace's attacker, Arthur Bremer, who find their lives so meaningless that they seek to express their bitterness in one destructive act, an outrage against society. The fourth type is made up of the psychotics, those who have only a tenuous contact with reality, and who suffer from major delusions - whether like Andrew Jackson's attacker, Richard Lawrence, who sometimes thought he was Richard III, or in the form of the belief shared by a number of such assassins that their murderous mission was divinely inspired.

There are some facets of his subject which Clarke considers only incidentally, if at all. For example, he does not draw attention to the fact that six of the fifteen assassins were born (or, in the case of Czolgosz, at least conceived) outside the United States. Again, he does not attempt to distinguish between the various assassins or would-be assassins, according to the seriousness of their intent to kill a particular individual. There are substantial grounds for doubting whether Lynette Fromme or Sara Jane Moore really intended to kill President Ford. (The chamber of Fromme's gun was found to contain no bullet.) Did the two Puerto Ricans involved in an affray on the steps of Blair House seriously intend or expect to kill Harry Truman, or were they simply hoping to attract attention to their cause by staging a violent protest in front of the president's temporary residence? They were not even sure that Truman was in the building. (In fact, Truman was still settling down to a post-prandial nap in the house directly above the entrance.) Did Sirhan really intend or expect to kill Richard Nixon when he concocted his bizarre plan to force an airline pilot to crash his plane on to the White House roof, or

was he making some more general anti-government gesture? (In fact, he got no further than a cockpit shoot-out on the ground at Baltimore Airport.) Fromme, Moore, Byke and the two Puerto Ricans clearly belong in a quite different category from Killian, Booth, Oswald, Sirhan and Ray, who had their targets in their sights, and had no compunction in pulling the trigger.

Disappointingly, Clarke also neglects the possibilities of comparison between the United States and other countries. After raising in his introduction the question why assassinations should occur in a society with a firmly entrenched democratic tradition, he returns to the issue only briefly in his conclusion - and then asks, surprisingly and oppositely, why he asks, have there been so relatively few assassinations when there must have been many people who shared the characteristics associated with his four types of assassins? Rightly, he argues that not merely must the inclination be present but also the opportunity - and he adds some sensible and persuasive remarks about the easy availability of hand-guns. Skilfully, too, he steers his readers between the two simplistic extremes of explanation, steering away from exclusive concentration upon psychiatric disorders or from sweeping generalizations about violence in American society. But nowhere does he attempt comparison with other Western democracies.

One may speculate that, paradoxically, the incidence of assassination in America may be explained, in part, by the very openness of a society in which defence has never come easily, and participation in the political process is said to be available to all. The power cannot rely for protection upon the psychological or cultural defence which may surround them in most traditional societies. On the other hand, the fate of the outsider in a wide open society - or what he feels to be a particularly unhappy one. He may find temptation hard to resist when both subtle targets and, even more, the means to attack them, are so accessible.

Professor Clarke has written an absorbing and, in some respects, a genuinely fascinating book. He may not always convince his readers, but he will surely provoke and intrigue them.

Joseph Chamberlain and Leo Amery saw Disraeli's social imperialism as the only effective antidote to Liberal utopianism and Marxist subversion. Neville Chamberlain sought to enliven his efficient but drab administration of health in the 1920s by claiming the mantle of Disraeli for his sanitary reforms, while in the 1950s John Macleod carried Tory history to its redemptive end by asserting that the work of Tory Democracy had been inaugurated by Disraeli, continued by Lord Randolph Churchill, and was nearing completion in an administration headed by Lord Randolph's son.

More recently, Disraeli has been enlisted in the colours of rival Tory factions. "Disraelian conservatism" has been a code word for "wet", while Robert Blake had made a chivalrous attempt to portray Disraeli as a loyal supporter of the present administration. Disraeli's central concern, however, was the preservation of the power of the landed aristocracy, "the territorial constitution of England", and his ideals lie far from modern pre-conceptions. As for Mrs Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph, one cannot help feeling that Disraeli would have regarded them less as pillars of Toryism than as objects of satire deserving a place in his novels, rather than in the pantheon of Tory heroes.

The reality of Disraeli's career was laid bare in Robert Blake's ruthlessly unflinching biography published in 1966. "Tearing off the veil of discretion", he wrote, "he showed the official biography that Disraeli's early rebuffs were as much the product of his raffish and disreputable youth as of Victorian hostility to a Jewish outsider. Far from nurturing a set of consistent principles during the unrequited years of Peel and Palmerston, until the expansion of the electorate offered the opportunity of putting the principles of Tory Democracy into effect, Disraeli was revealed as a political opportunist entirely lacking in either coherence or steadiness of application. When asked what Tory Democracy stood for, Disraeli could easily have used Lord Randolph Churchill's invariable answer - 'I stood for a democracy which voted Tory'. Blake's analysis, indeed, did not hesitate to reveal the insubstantiality of many of the preconceptions which continue to animate Tory politics.

And yet the Disraeli myth survives. It was first applied to the political needs of the time by Lord Randolph himself who persisted, against all the evidence, in regarding Disraeli as the Victor of the Fourth Party; while

expanded rapidly. In so doing he offended the Treasury, the Churchillian opposition, the Labour Party, Lord Nuffield, and the aircraft manufacturers. Unable to defend himself in the Commons, he became a political liability, and was duly sacked. The rest was anti-climax. In such minor roles during the years, and as an elder statesman in the Conservative party he was respected, but only from those who knew what he was doing.

For a man noted, in 1930, as a potential Prime Minister, this is a disappointing record. But for the Air Ministry, Swinton might easily be remembered as the man who gave us the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (in 1923). By forcing the reader to concentrate on administrative involvement in this way, the biography effectively conceals the sense of humour and caustic wit, but there are no examples of ribaldry, and only one joke. Evidently Swinton was an abrasive minister; but there is enough material in hints, asides, and undeveloped themes in this book to raise the possibility that but for the Air Ministry fiasco he might have been an early, and administratively formidable, Butskellite. Keen on economic planning, interested in social reform, an exponent of Puseok and always sympathetic towards Lloyd George's economic ideas: here is somebody distinctive among leading Conservatives of his generation, even if all the ideas were borrowed.

Was Swinton representative of an interesting facet of twentieth-century conservatism? We cannot tell from this biography, and since its subject is unlikely to attract another biographer, we shall probably never know.

But what of the more modest theme of defence: that Home had been attacked maliciously and incoherently? It is true that the three biographies of him that have appeared in recent decades all take the view that he was no more than a gifted conjurer, and it is

# Doubtfully democratic

Vernon Bogdanor

SARAH BRADFORD

Disraeli  
432pp. Widenfeld and Nicolson.  
£14.95.  
0 207 78143 7

"Disraeli", according to Buckle, "appears as a grand and magnificent figure, standing solitary, towering above his contemporaries; the man of fervid imagination and vision wide and deep, and a nation of narrow, pedantic minds, philistine, Puritan, riding his life at once a romance and a tragedy, but a splendid tragedy; himself the greatest of our statesmen since the days of Chatham and Pitt". Buckle's accolade, which serves as the climax to the massive six-volume "official" biography completed in 1920, would hardly be echoed by historians today. Indeed there are few Victorian politicians to whom the language of hagiography seems less appropriate than Disraeli.

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# Positively psychic

Michael Mason

ELIZABETH JENKINS

The Shadow and the Light: A Defence of Daniel Douglas Home, the Medium  
275pp. Hamish Hamilton. £12.95.  
0 241 10892 6

There is a polemical note in the subtitle of this new life of Daniel Douglas Home; but the literature about Home is inevitably polemical. He was the most successful of all the Victorian mediums, and for the biographer of such a figure there is really only one question: was he genuine or not? The literature has, on balance, said "not". Elizabeth Jenkins feels that Home's denigrators have been malicious and incoherent, and some of the more careful passages in her book deal with such cases. But intuitively enough this is not the end of the matter. The great question about Home, his genuineness, amounts to another great question: is a metaphysical one. It would be an intellectually cold-blooded book which remained content with simply criticizing Home's enemies, and Elizabeth Jenkins has no intention of doing so. She presses the defence of her subject to the hilt. Her Daniel Douglas Home is a man truly possessed of "psychic powers".

Such a project requires tact in the handling if you hope to be taken seriously by readers who do not share your metaphysical beliefs. All proposals about supernatural agencies and forces must be seen to spring from the historical facts, and not from a prior affiliation in the author. Elizabeth Jenkins starts off prudently in her foreword:

To any impartial person who reads the very strong evidence for Home's super-normal power: his levitation, his fire-handling, his telekinesis, his appearing in supernatural light, it appears impossible to accept that these effects were produced by fraud.

But she soon - as early as the description of Home's birth - begins to give the game away: "he was on the cusp of the Zodiacal sign of Pisces; the subjects of this sign are said to be . . .". It is not quite a case of an author describing her hero in terms which prejudice her verdict on him; it will surely seem sufficiently like it to alienate many readers. And once Ms Jenkins moves on to the account of Home's professional life this fallacy, so characteristic of arguments for psychic phenomena, is many times perpetuated in a pure form. The text is full of references to "powers", "communications", and the rest; the very things which are meant to be in question.

The book indeed betrays itself as written out of a high degree of partisanship for spiritualism as an institution, past and present. Ms Jenkins depends for her version of Home's life almost entirely on the three nineteenth-century works of unabashed propaganda for his powers: Home's own *Incidents of my Life*, and two posthumous offerings by his wife, *D. D. Home, His Life and Mission* and *The Gift of D. D. Home*. At one point there is a baffling reference to a "Dr George Zorab", an expert on "the present stage of psychical research", according to whom "it has now been ascertained" that ectoplasm exists. Hence the physical link between a "split hand" and Home's shoulder (detected by a sceptical observer in an 1855 *review*) was not Home's arm. What is more, the admitted fact that "the substance [ectoplasm] has been counterfeited by fraudulent mediums" shows that its existence is "accepted" and its appearance outwardly recognized to make an imitation intelligible. Such arguments indicate how very far Ms Jenkins is from understanding the game of mind of an "impartial reader", or what is required to convince such a person.

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# State of the union

Anthony Quinton

EDMUND FAWCETT AND TONY THOMAS

America, Americans  
486pp. Collins. £12.95.  
0 00 216519 8

This substantial piece of social description is pitched somewhere between the ambitious generality of Max Lerner's *America as a Civilization* (1957) and the chatty particularity of John Gunther's *Inside U.S.A.* (1947). Both of the earlier books appear dated now. Gunther is too irritatingly folksy; like an accumulation of bookish footnotes from *The Reader's Digest*. Only an occasional snippet of fact goes beyond the political and for him politics is very much a matter of individual politicians. The handful of men who get into chapter headings seem very remote: Henry Kaiser, Harold Stassen, Arthur Vandenberg, Leverett Saltonstall, Thomas E. Dewey. Max Lerner is dated by his imperial confidence. The America of Edmund Fawcett and Tony Thomas is an uneasy place.

To some extent they write from outside (like Bryce, the author of the best book of this general sort); they are journalists who have worked for the *Economist* in the United States. Apparently the book was written primarily for American readers. Its lavish physical production indicates its having been printed in the United States and its American title - *The American Condition* - is the way in which it refers to itself in the text.

Fawcett and Thomas note that Americans like statistics and provide them in generous quantities, but easily, in the course of their exposition, not in paralyzing tables. Here are some examples: three out of four Americans live in metropolitan areas; between 1950 and 1970 America's share of the world's GNP fell from 40 per cent to 20 per cent; a third of America's agricultural production is exported and four-fifths of it comes from one-fifth of the farms; seventeen of the twenty largest school systems have a majority of black school-children; only four of the hundred leading industrial firms have Jewish heads; ten per cent of children go to private schools, but two-thirds of them are at Catholic parochial schools.

The book is as pleasantly written as its fairly tedious material will allow. Now and then there is a quiet literary flourish as when they write "the establishment moderates" or thought of themselves as the best, but more and more they come to lack conviction. Or again, of the reaction of German Jews in late nineteenth-century America to the influx of the *Ostjuden*, "Were all the gains they had made to be compromised by these huddled masses with their funny clothes, strange dialects, and decidedly uncomfortable ideas?"

A very desirable qualification the authors possess is that they appear to like America and its inhabitants. Many perhaps, will be shocked to hear that they are biased about baseball and when they observe that American football is not much fun to play they imply that it is fun to watch, once you have some idea what is going on. On

this subject they point out that American sport is much less violent than it once was. In 1905 nineteen university footballers were killed. Theodore Roosevelt was moved to protest, although not in favour of mollifying them. They also imply that American sports crowds nowhere seem to approach the disgusting barbarism of the mobs that attend football matches in Britain. They defend criticism of American TV by asking, bad compared to what? They refer with pleasant indulgence, to America's "spoilt, happy children".

By and large the verdict they reach after their anatomy of the social, economic and political condition of America, is that, considering how old and stiff the institutional structure is, the patient is in quite lively shape. Americans continue to distrust government and, indeed, firm institutional arrangements of any sort, as obstacles to individual energy and energy about and it breaks through. One point they lay on is that the productive equipment of America is not being replaced and updated as quickly enough. From time to time they insist on the need for another 5 per cent of the GNP, \$150 billion in other words, to be shifted from consumption into investment. One difficulty here is that the tax system favours investment in housing. Another is that the recent revolution in banking, which has made banks offer competitive rates of interest to those with money to lend, has drawn vast amounts of cash into the secure, high-yielding money market.

No positive proposals for political reform are put forward although the

# Totally Tory

J. A. Turner

J. A. CROSS

Lord Swinton  
338pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
£19.50.  
0 19 822602 0

Lord Swinton is not memorable. Born Philip Lloyd-Greame in 1884, he became Cunliffe-Lister in 1924 and Viscount Swinton in 1935. He was President of the Board of Trade in 1922-3, from 1924 to 1929, and in 1931; Colonial Secretary from 1931 to 1935 and Commonwealth Secretary from 1935 to 1938. Neville Chamberlain sacked him from the Air Ministry when public criticism of the Senator. But the mention of specific persons is fairly rare. It throws little light on the original idea in his head, Swinton was the archetype of a Tory administrator; as such he is an unwelcome subject for biography and an unlikely object of public remembrance.

Though Swinton will never be seen in the leading rank of British politicians, these first impressions are misleading. Just he was more interesting than Professor Cross's uninteresting administrative study allows him to be. The son of a Yorkshire landowner, he read law at Oxford and took articles with Sir Thomas MacLiffe-Elis, the organizer of the Mining Association of Great Britain. He became a Tory candidate in 1911. He won the MC on the Somme















# Taking the stage

Richard Langham Smith

ROBERT ORLEDGE

Debussy and the Theatre  
383pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£25.  
0 521 22807 7

Some deliberation must have gone into the choice of title for this book. "Theatre" is a word with many shades of meaning. "Theatre people", as Debussy found to his cost, could be ruthless professionals who brandish contracts, irrevocably dampened his initial enthusiasm for a collaborative project, or who, as *metteurs-en-scène*, could drive a coach and four through his intimate and interiorized theatre pieces. Of the French theatre, in particular the Opéra, Debussy was deeply suspicious. Using his most vitriolic turns of phrase he criticized its every aspect. Nor did he spare the Opéra-Comique: "a tomb where all light is pitilessly extinguished". On the other hand he loved Covent Garden and never missed the opportunity of sneaking off to one of the variety theatres near Cambridge Circus.

Robert Orledge approaches Debussy as "a man of the theatre" and aims to give a full and varied picture of Debussy's theatrical experiences as possible. Many readers will doubtless be surprised at the extent of these and might be forgiven for raising an eyebrow at the idea that Debussy was ever much of a "man of the theatre" at all. However, it is in this context that the present author studies the composer: less from within, more from without.

Take the case of *Pelléas*, which forms a central chapter around which earlier and later projects are examined. An approach from within might begin by fathoming the symbolic interplay of contraries in Maeterlinck's play and continue by charting Debussy's responses in terms of the variety of musical languages he employs. Dr Orledge, by contrast, follows the thread of Debussy's encounter with the original play, by quoting interviews and letters goes on to examine in detail the extant sketches for the opera, following the work through to its first performance and beyond. Vividly evoked is the traumatic dress rehearsal from which (according to the producer) Debussy "over recovered". Musicologists will find the author's piecing together of a chronology from the sketches curiously argued while the lay musician can delight in the admirably presented musical examples showing the composer's gradual forging of the central love-scene.

The book opens with a useful history of French theatre, placing in context the Symbolist and Parnassian ventures to which Debussy was attracted, and incidentally hinting up the complete review of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas* as a play "swallowing music". There follows a chapter which, through no fault of the author, is ultimately frustrating. It deals with two early works which are almost totally inaccessible. One is the cantata *Diane au Bois*, the other the incomplete opera *Rodrigue et Chimène*. Orledge whets our appetite for both but we would be wise to wait until we have heard them before unquestioningly accepting his judgment that "Diane is far more restrained and prophetic of what is to come than *Rodrigue*". This latter, I think, will yield more links with *Pelléas* than might be thought. A few notes and accidentals in the *Rodrigue* quotations sound odd and students of *El Cid* might well disagree with the claim that *Peranules* is omitted, for he is surely the same as Don Pedro de Tercel.

The author's approach yields further insights along these lines in relation to other later works. Both *Khamma* and *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* receive particularly full chapters. In the case of the former, the relationship to Stravinsky is highlighted and the dealings with Maud Allan, an amusingly sketched in. Silky photos complete the picture and again we respond to Orledge's call to reconsider the work, in which he finds "superb structure".

So much for the more or less performable works. Interspersed are the most penetrating studies to date on the scrap-heap of abandoned projects which litter the composer's later years. Many of these as Pierre Louys, their gestation and abandonment supported by revealing correspondence. These considerably amplify our picture of Debussy's all-important relationship with literature and form an integral part of the web of developing literary strands which made the composer what he was. There were Shakespeare projects, oriental ones, flirtations with the occult (a subject much advanced by this book), an *Opéra de comédie*, even a projected version of Leu's gently pornographic *Aphrodite*. In each case we are given virtually all that is known about the projects. But though Orledge points out cross-fertilizations between these and contemporary instrumental works this hardly compensates for our profound sense of loss as we read of these might-have-beens.

Some trumps turn up with stage revivals of earlier works. There are some marvellously fey photographs of the *corps de ballet* for a number called "Spring", given at the Alhambra in 1914 along with a trick cyclist and a Chinese juggler, the score being none other than Debussy's *Printemps*. Our view of Debussy in England is considerably broadened by these iconographical additions.

Yet there is a fundamental paradox at the root of this book: Debussy was

## Hearing the thoughts

William Drabkin

JOHN CRABBE

Beethoven's Empire of the Mind  
135pp. Lovell Baines Print Ltd.  
Hollington, Woolton Hill, Newbury,  
Berkshire. £5.95.  
0 946239 002

Most music-lovers will, I suppose, regard Beethoven as the first true Romantic composer, the first in whom they sense an important - indeed an essential - relation between the artist himself and the work he has left behind. The circumstances of Beethoven's life and his attitudes towards his fellow men, the arts and politics are things which, in the words of John Crabbe, "can so often be sensed just beneath the surface of his music".

The principal external and internal circumstances that have been brought to bear on our picture of Beethoven are not too difficult to identify: the political turbulence felt throughout Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century; and the composer's increasing affliction by deafness. A child of the Enlightenment, Beethoven left his native city of Bonn shortly after the overthrow of the French monarchy and lived for the rest of his life in Vienna through periods of open warfare and political - and, to some extent, cultural - oppression. The composition of a piano sonata in 1809-10 - the "Lebewohl" ("Les Adieux") - around a "programme" of the exile and subsequent return of his pupil and patron, Archduke Rudolph, can be taken as one example of Beethoven's concern for humanity working its way into the fabric of his music.

To be sure, Beethoven was neither the first handicapped composer nor the only one whose personal life was unhappy. But his deafness, which affected him severely from the age of about thirty, must be taken as a crucial factor in the change from an essentially Classical, eighteenth-century style to that of the so-called "middle period" by which many important features of musical Romanticism have come to be defined; it is still appropriate to regard works like the "Eroica" Symphony (1803-4), the "Waldstein" and "Appassionata" sonatas (1803-5), the opera *Leonore* (1805-6; later called *Fidelio*) and the concertos and string

quartets of 1806 as marking the beginning of a new phase in Western music.

In *Beethoven's Empire of the Mind*, Mr Crabbe has sifted through the known facts of Beethoven's life to reassess the great composer as an early Romantic intellectual. He writes cogently about his subject, moving quickly and easily from an account of the age in which the composer lived to essays on Beethoven as humanist, political thinker, literary critic, philosopher, theologian, and genius. Some Beethovenians may object to Crabbe's deliberately intended (though not wholly successful) suppression of his own opinions about Beethoven as a musician; but from the tangled threads of Beethoven's life there emerges a picture at once sympathetic in its broad outlines and, appropriately, full of internal conflict and contradiction. The book is refreshingly free of judgments based on long-standing biographical inaccuracies or on anecdotes of doubtful authenticity. Most important of all, Crabbe's assessment of the composer's character in the context of early nineteenth-century politics and the philosophy remains compatible with the thoughts which Beethoven's music seems to express.

But this is not a book for the Beethoven specialist; nor, as its publishers misleadingly claim, is it a really new type of Beethoven study. Many of its conclusions are congruent with, if not actually drawn from, the results of much modern research - above all from the work of Maynard Solomon, whose own Beethoven biography (1977) is itself in part a summary of some fifteen years' research into the composer's "mind". Crabbe's book can be read comfortably in one sitting, yet it will not hold up well as a work of reference: titles of German musical and literary works are often given only in English translation, as are crucial passages of text quoted therefrom.

Finally, I must object to the author's implication that we already have plenty of good books on Beethoven as a composer, and that "the musical life of the composer has been examined exhaustively". Nothing could be further from the truth. Since Tovey, addressed to the non-specialist, have a few books on the subject, and in some areas, notably the symphonies and piano sonatas, serious studies remain in short supply.

## Pursuing pleasure

Peter Porter

PAUL GRIFFITHS (Editor)

Igor Stravinsky: The Rake's Progress  
199pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£9.95 (paperback, £3.95).  
0 521 23746 7

It is hard to imagine an audience for this study of Stravinsky's only full-length opera. It is nothing like thorough enough to act as a source book on the *The Rake's Progress*, yet it does not contain much original criticism other than a little of the higher showing-off. Since its first performance at La Fenice in Venice on September 13, 1951, *The Rake's Progress* has picked up strenuous opponents on its tour around the world's theatres. Britten's injudicious remarks that the music was assembled in the manner of a stamp collection, and that he admired the libretto (remark which did not amuse Stravinsky), set the tone of much Anglo-Saxon suspicion of this unexpected gift to the English-speaking world from the twentieth century's greatest composer.

*The Rake's Progress* is Stravinsky's longest work and is, I believe, at the centre of his creative achievement, but it is undeniably a challenge to the temperament of most opera-goers. Today's post-Boulezian critics, of whom Paul Griffiths is surely one, are content to praise and analyse Stravinsky's music, and permit his and Auden's dramaturgy to continue to revolve in one of the inner circles of academic self-immolation. Operas by great composers have to live in the theatre alongside works by men who may be only composers of great operas. Thus *Fidelio* and *Pelléas et Mélisande* must justify themselves in action to survive competition with *Carmen* and *Andromache*. *The Rake's Progress*, for all its seemingly unnatural elements (bearded lady, breed machine and unheroic Rake) is theatre *à la mode*, as I have always felt on the many occasions I have seen it performed, and as I feel almost as strongly when I listen to the music on records. Mr Griffiths quotes Auden's observation: "No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they are being sensible." This is more confusing than helpful: it fails to distinguish between what will work on the stage and what won't, since people could do all manner of things more efficiently if they weren't singing, sensible things or silly ones. Song is the vehicle of opera, and artificially and naturalism are only genres within that given form.

The public's suspicion of *The Rake's Progress* does not spring from the fantastic elements in the plot; nobody worries at Richard Strauss's predilection for women in breeches roles, though this makes much of the action in *Arabella* decidedly queer. Rather, discontent is centred on the feeling that three clever men (the librettists and the composer) are lecturing their audience, that *The Rake* is an intellectual contrivance, and that it is Hogarth the moralist and not Hogarth the depicter of real life who is being followed. A proper study of text and music and decent familiarity with the opera on the stage will dispel this false view. *The Rake's Progress* is above all a touching human work, though with a strong anti-Pelagian leaning. Griffiths's handbook gives little sign that this is his view of what is shared by his collaborators, Robert Craft excepted. We are back in the classroom - basic evaluation at the blackboard is topped up by paradox-peddling, chiefly from Gabriel Jospovici in his chapter "Some thoughts on the libretto". Much will be incomprehensible to anyone who does not know *The Rake* well. Surely a handbook should offer as basic ingredients the complete libretto, very thorough musical analysis and a full account of the stage action. Even the opera's planning and birth are more fully covered in the Stravinsky/Craft dialogues. Griffiths seems to have commissioned nothing specially for his book - everything apart from his own chapters existing somewhere previously, and has been enlisted for the occasion. Musical analysis and stage action are crowded into his "Synopsis", where the real interest lies in his observations of

Stravinsky's dramatic use of key.

Much the best writing comes from the composer, reproduced from two of the Stravinsky/Craft books. Could anything be more to the point than this? "The Rake" ... offers nothing as so foolish as the concealed drama post-stabbing colouratura concert a *Rigoleto*, to name two far greater operas, which, like my own, I love beyond the point where criticism can make a difference." The force of love, which, incidentally, is what Auden proves in spite of his bargains and Augustinian digressions, shines through the imaginative Auden and Stravinsky, two quite different personages outside the boundaries of their art.

Robert Craft contributes an almost short "Note on the sketches and two versions of the libretto". This should be read with Craft's and Stravinsky's other comments on *The Rake's Progress* otherwise quite cryptic. Here one encounters a few tantalizing lines from a prologue in rhymed couplets which Auden provided for "the second part" of the opera for a BBC TV transmission in 1958, in which Stravinsky summarizes the action so far. It apparently only sixty lines, so the Auden estate might have been persuaded to allow it to be reproduced. The "Performance History" chapter is fairly perfunctory though it contains a polemical but not a particularly ingenuously Bergman production is a Stravinsky colloquy. There are some stimulating notions in Gábor Jospovici's chapter, though the reader will have to fight with the syntax of his opening sentence: "No two words of Stravinsky are alike, but *The Rake's Progress* is more different than most." Yet Jospovici does care for Auden and Stravinsky's work, and by the end of his article, he is in the open and is just flapping his academic gown. His suggestion that the bread making, that "excellent device" by which "... man shall re-enter Paradise" is the work of the opera, is well worth pondering.

The graveyard scene (Act 3, Scene 2) has always been the favourite of severe commentators, but the composer's own commentary on the scene, as well as the brilliant and classical of the opera's earlier scenes, Griffiths examines this scene in some detail, and does so well. Yet, in his chapter, "Progress and return", he points out, interestingly, that Stravinsky's backward-facing progressivism, he points out, interestingly, that Stravinsky's last aria, "I burn, I freeze", is the only time that character stays in the music for an extended piece. The music mode as The Tempter's realm, he also comments that "the fallacy of great many twentieth century audiences is due to the fact that the audience is consistently more sophisticated than the persons exhibited on the stage." Have operas ever been otherwise from the Florentine Academy to *La Grand Macabre*?

Malcolm Walker's slender biography needs one addition, available to him at compilation, is an original French production, it is available on a Fonit/Cetra LP set, usually exorbitant sound, but revealing how well Elizabeth Schwarzkopf and Anne's Act One "I go to him" - remember - listening to the extraordinary operatic birth right from Venice over a crackling radio, and I shall never forget the impact of the *Brother* scene in particular. The *A Major* chorus of love and Rakewell's cecilian of love and pleasure, "The sun is bright, the grass is green," with "I wonder where Stravinsky wrote." I wonder where any poet since the Elizabethan period has made a composer, such a poet, more superbly to the challenge.

An illustrated companion to Stravinsky's works for the theatre, *Stravinsky on Stage* by Alexander Schweitzer and Victor Borovsky, has recently been published (0 852249 604) by Bell. £9.95. £22.00. Stravinsky's work is available in text and photographic each of the composer's stage works, and includes photographs, cast lists, and a record of productions, together with illustrations of set and costume designs.

## ECONOMIC HISTORY

# From steam to petrol

Harold Perkin

T. R. NICHOLSON

The Birth of the British Motor Car 1764-1897  
Volume 1, A New Machine 1769-1842. 163pp.  
0 333 23761 1  
Volume 2, Revival and Defeat 1842-91. 167-333.  
0 333 28561 1  
Volume 3, The Last Battle 1894-97.  
0 333 28562 8  
Macmillan, £20 each or £50 the set  
0 333 32717 9.

What would have happened to the British economy and society, not to say political democracy, if the railway had never been invented? Not such a hypothetical question since a dozen years ago the pioneer of counterfactual economics, Robert Fogel, raised that very query about the nineteenth-century American economy and came up with the surprising answer, "minus 6 per cent". Mere canals and better roads with horse-drawn barges and wagons would have kept the economy growing only slightly less fast than with the railways. Whether it would still have been the same United States from sea to shining sea is quite another question. But for Britain we do know the answer: the steam road vehicle.

In the 1820s and 1830s, when George and Robert Stephenson and their rivals were struggling with the massive civil engineering problems and the competitive rivalry of inventors and entrepreneurs were grappling with what at first sight, since it did not involve moving mountains, appeared to be the lesser problem of steam-powered road transport. Both railway

and the steam coach stemmed from the same basic innovation, Trevithick's high-pressure steam engine which, indeed, began as a road vehicle and carried itself up Beacon Hill, near Camberley, in 1801. With marginally better roads and a slightly faster development of engineering skills and materials to improve the power-to-weight ratio and strength of engines and boilers, the road steamer could have saved the country and the world from being cut up by fenced-in iron ribbons, cuttings, embankments, and tunnels, and the peer from being dehaused in hundreds of cities and set down on the wrong side of the tracks.

As the Duke of Wellington said of another battle, it was a damn near thing. Two pioneers in particular, among a veritable crowd of steam vehicle enthusiasts, might have won it. Goldsworthy Gurney had a practicable steam coach by 1828, two years before the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened, and in the early 1830s he ran a short-lived service between London and Bristol at speeds up to 14 mph. Walter Hancock, brother of Thomas, the founder of the rubber industry which was to be so vital to modern motor manufacture, ran steam omnibuses in London about the same time, covering the five miles from Paddington to the Bank, including stops, in an hour. Both were claimed to be cheaper per mile than the horse-drawn public vehicles, and were far more flexible than the railways. In 1835 Hancock also built the first "motor car", in the sense of a private "steam gig" or "phaeton" for three passengers, an anticipation of the modern sports-car.

These promising beginnings fizzled out under the difficulties of boiler explosions, transmission breakdowns, bad roads, the greed of the turnpike trusts, and the competition of the railways which, once they had climbed their mountain of capital commitment, could run smoothly on the high plateau of economies of scale. Steam on the

roads was relegated to the gigantic and unpopular traction-engines which hauled threshing-machines and fairground waggons and eventually led to the iniquitous Red Flag Act of 1865 which ensured that further pioneering in the field of mechanized road transport would take place anywhere but in Britain. Apart from a few experiments by rich and powerful zealots like the Marquess of Stafford and the Earl of Calthorpe, who toyed with steam cars in the 1860s, the birth of the petrol-driven motor-car was to take place in Germany, France and America.

The appearance of the British motor-car, therefore, was less a birth than an adoption. When Otto, Daimler and Benz in Germany, De Dion, Panhard and Peugeot in France, and Duryea, Pennington and Ford in the United States, had solved most of the problems, the British in the 1890s were averse to purchase the rights to sell and/or manufacture what was essentially a foreign invention. Enthusiasts like Sir David Salomons and the Hon Evelyn Ellis wanted the glory, and crooked company floaters like Harry J. Lawson and Ernest T. Hooley pursued the quick profits of a British-based motor industry. The tortuous story of the repeal of the (supposed) Red Flag Act, the Great Horseless Carriage Company and the first London to Brighton Run in 1896 are told here once again as a British triumph along the lines of Dunkirk - which, in the sense that the British motor industry lived to fight another day, it was.

This inordinately expensive book, at £20 a slim volume or £50 for the set of three, amounting in all to 506 pages at 9.5 pence per page, tells this familiar story in exhaustive but not very original detail. T. R. Nicholson is a motor-car buff, who has already published over twenty books on motoring history. As one might expect, the focus is mainly technological and legislative, on the engineering problems and political obstacles which faced the heroic pioneers, and how

his work gave great satisfaction. He was eventually dismissed for having married a "Macclesfield Whore" and become a Roman Catholic. Jörg gives us a full account of the life-style of the Dutch personnel at Canton and Macao. This was very similar to that of their more or less friendly rivals of the "Honourable John Company", as depicted in the *Memoirs* of the inimitable William Hickey. Jörg, to the only error which can spot in this book, mistakenly terms Hickey an American - something which that thoroughly John Bullish character would not have relished.

Until the appearance of the Americans towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch were the greatest traders at Canton after the English; but they were a long way behind them. The VOC never sent more than six or seven Indianmen to the Pearl River in a given year, whereas the English often numbered about twenty to thirty, between EIC ships and "Country Traders". The export of Chinese porcelain to Europe was on a betole scale. Allen Catepooch at Chusan in November 1701, contracted for 534,738 cups, apart from plates, dishes, and bowls. Some 42 million pieces of porcelain were sold at the VOC sales in the Netherlands between 1730 and 1789. The Swedes, relatively late-comers (1732), who usually sent only a couple of ships a year, imported 2.5 million pieces in 1765-86. The Dutch, French, Ostenders, and even the Prussians, all got into the act to a greater or lesser extent. With all of them, tea and silk were likewise more profitable and important than was porcelain. In several respects, Jörg's magnificent book gives us the best survey of the China Trade in the eighteenth century. It certainly amplifies and corrects the classic but by now inevitably rather dated works of H. B. Morse, *The Tradelines of the East-India Company* (London, 1959), 1635-1834 (3 Vols, Geford, 1926-29) and L. Denham, *The China, or the East-India Company's Canton in XVII 1662, 1719-1833* (4 Vols, Paris, 1964).

they failed, or, later, succeeded in overcoming them. The author raises in the last few pages the question why the private motor-car failed to take root (his metaphor) when circumstances seemed so favourable in 1831-2 and especially (he says) in 1861, and yet did so after 1896, and claims that "the explanations customarily offered beg this question". His own answer, though more "complex", is entirely on the same plane as the traditional ones, however: the technological weaknesses of the early steam coaches, the badness of roads which were none the less adequate for comfortable horse carriages, the diversion of capital into railways which for long-distance travel became so much swifter and more convenient, the distraction of the unpopular steam road-tractors, the restrictive speed legislation, and so on. The only modification to the traditional view is his belief that only about half the turnpike trusts actually concerned themselves with steam vehicles and only a minority deliberately obstructed them.

What is missing from the story is any broader consideration of the social and economic context in which the competing forms of transport

operated. The rapid growth of the economy, the unprecedented expansion of population and its concentration in ever larger towns and cities, the consequent demand for transport of both goods and people which could not have been met by the old methods, the increasing cost of horses and the fact that horse-fodder production by the end of the century was taking up the equivalent of a quarter of the arable land, and above all the almost unlimited growth, given rising living standards, especially in the middle class, of demand for personal and local public transport: all these factors which came to a head in the last few decades of the century are ignored or taken for granted rather than explored and analysed. Technological difficulties and legislative hindrances are problems to be solved, and the ingenuity and vigour with which the Victorians overcame other obstacles to material progress show how easily they could have overcome the problem of mechanized road transport if they had seen the need to do so. This thorough and would-be definitive book raises the right questions but, because of its narrow focus, falls somewhat short of answering them.

## Looking out to sea

David Geggus

JOHN G. CLARK

La Rochelle and the Atlantic Economy during the Eighteenth Century  
286pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £16.75.  
0 8018 2529 6

During the last seventy-five years of the Ancien Régime, France's foreign trade increased five-fold, fed by the burgeoning wealth of the West Indian colonies. The commerce of the other states of the Great Britain's empire matched this performance. The port of La Rochelle played only a small part in this expansion, and during the eighteenth century it fell progressively behind its competitors. It remained, even so, among the five or six major French seaports, and because of its Protestant character and its unusual degree of dependence on the colonial trade, it is a subject of particular interest. J. G. Clark's study is therefore a welcome addition to the massive tomes on Nantes, Bordeaux and Marseilles that have issued in recent years from French universities.

Clark identifies a group of thirty families which controlled the economic life of eighteenth-century La Rochelle. He examines their kinship and commercial relations and follows the careers of the most famous. It is the first study, he claims, of the entire merchant class of a major French seaport. While many of the merchants invested in land, mines and office, and a few were employed, Clark denies that they exhibited any tendency to withdraw from commerce, once successful. The bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, he argues, should be distinguished from that of the inland towns. Most Rochelais wealth, he claims, remained committed to maritime enterprise, though under this heading the author includes vineyards, salt-pans and colonial plantations. Although religious persecution persisted into the eighteenth century, the Huguenot minority in La Rochelle continued to dominate its maritime trade and business activity in general. While Catholic merchants were appointed more frequently to public office, Protestants pioneered the growth sectors of insurance, sugar-refining and the East India trade. The two groups did not intermarry but friction between them was minimal. They co-operated to business ventures and, allied in the defence of local interests against external competition and the encroachment of a predatory state.

Clark places great emphasis on the baleful influence of the central government as a hindrance to economic growth. He details the way it sucked capital from the maritime economy and opened arbitrary barriers

to trade. La Rochelle's municipal government was so burdened with royal exactions that it could never afford to clear the harbour of the silt that was progressively blocking it. The decline of the local brandy and salt trades can be directly attributed to fiscal policy. Every war was an unmitigated disaster and brought in its train a wave of bankruptcies. The loss of Canada and Louisiana hit La Rochelle especially hard.

In addition, the town suffered from certain geographical disadvantages. Unlike Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes or Le Havre, it lacked easy access to the interior and the domestic market. With neither the prospect of a not extensive local industry, it failed to develop strong secondary trades and concentrated heavily on importing tropical products for re-export to northern Europe. To try and recoup wartime losses, *amateurs* increasingly became drawn into the slave trade, which could be very profitable but involved high risk and tied up large amounts of capital for long periods of time. In the West Indies, merchants were able to charge exorbitant prices but were compelled to offer credit which planters stretched out with a creole disregard for the passage of time. Clark declines to say exactly who exploited whom, but he casts some interesting light on this vicious circle. Even successful voyages, he shows, could take over six years to show a profit. By the 1780s, more and more Rochelais funds were being immobilized in the Caribbean, reducing merchants' liquidity and preventing diversification into other trades. The port was in irreversible decline.

The book contains some excellent descriptions of business organization. There is a good chapter on marine insurance (already published in part) and the author breaks new ground in his investigation of capital provision and capital flow. The nature and quantity of the data mean that many of the arguments are speculative rather than conclusive. One wonders if more investigation of the European, as opposed to oceanic, trade might modify some of his conclusions. However, though the focus is often very narrow, Clark takes care to place his findings in a broad perspective. It is as a well-rounded analysis of the political economy of a port town that the work is most impressive. The text is marred by a rather clumsy style and the presentation tends to lack clarity. The proof-reading seems to have been somewhat negligent: French words are frequently misspelled. The index, however, is helpful, and the conclusion conveniently summarizes the author's many arguments and findings.

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